

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
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THE STRUGGLE OF MAN  
- religious and social -  
AS A CENTRAL MOTIF IN THE WRITINGS  
of S.Y. AGNON

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September, 1975.

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## PREFACE

## PREFACE

Agnon has a unique place in Hebrew literature. At present, he is unique in being the only Hebrew author whose literary enterprise was given the supreme international recognition: the Nobel Prize for Literature. Among his natural readers, the Hebrew readers, critics and scholars, he has achieved incomparable admiration and respect. If the volume of critical writing which sprang up around Agnon is any indication of the public interest in his work, then he stands far above any Hebrew writer of recent times. The bibliography of papers on Agnon contains some two thousand items.<sup>1</sup> Even now, when abundant criticism has come forth for over half a century, new works on Agnon are published with growing frequency.

The quantity of Agnon's writings is also most impressive.<sup>2</sup> In addition to all that has already been published, there are, several volumes which have not yet seen print.<sup>3</sup>

This large corpus is varied in many respects: period, background, content and style.

From a time aspect, Agnon's writing is spread out over many centuries. While in his "Complete Works" Agnon goes only as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century,<sup>4</sup> in "Ir Umelo-a" he goes as far back as the founding of his home town Buczacz, some six centuries ago,<sup>5</sup> describing all the ensuing generations. Naturally, the later generations are dealt with in greater detail, but the distant past, too, has its place.

The backgrounds for the stories are diversified, from Polish fables through university orientated Jerusalem and 'Bilvav Yamim' and Germany of the First World War to 'The Book of Deeds'.

The same is true of the subject matter: Chassidim and their opposers the Mitnagdim, naive men and shrewd ones, simple folk and great wardens, gay folk tales and lamentations for destruction and desolation and "Chapters from The Book of The State". Everything which passed before the author's eyes influenced him and he shaped it and recorded it for posterity.

The style, too, is varied. He created the unique Agnonian style, which is an art in itself, yet here too may be discerned many intonations. Their style of 'The Bridal Canopy' is different from the style of 'Tmol Shilshom' and these two differ greatly from the style of 'Chupat Dodim' or 'The Book of Deeds'. Some of Agnon's stories are read at ease, for pleasure, while others require great effort in order to enter the depths of meaning concealed in level upon level of possible interpretations.

This diversity raises the question of unity in Agnon's writings. Is it possible that the many parts of this tremendous literary enterprise are connected to each other?

On this question of unity there is very little, if any, disagreement among the critics of Agnon. The idea of one of the pioneers in Agnon criticism, A.M. Lifshitz that "he is one in all the worlds he envisaged, in his epic tranquility and spiritual calm"<sup>6</sup> is commonly accepted.

The later critics are almost unanimous in their acceptance of Lifshitz's concept of unity. Kurtzweil stated that:

"There are no two Agnons, in the same way that there are no two Bialiks".<sup>7</sup>

"The Agnonian epic is surprising in its wealth and variety ... but the most wonderful thing in Agnon's epic world is the awareness that a unified artistic vision is the basis of this enterprise, with all its meaningfulness."<sup>8</sup>

"An approach is needed for the real understanding of a single literary work within the framework of the total enterprise of any great writer, and particularly for the understanding of Agnon's writings: that is, to see the single literary phenomenon also from a synoptic vision within the framework of the total enterprise. Whoever reads in this manner will surely gain many meaningful associations, which will flow to him from the most strange and distant corners of the poet's world. The single poem, the epic details are suddenly seen as an organic part of a great unity, which is the complete enterprise of the writer."<sup>9</sup>

Yaakov Fichman, himself a writer:

"It is the wonder of completeness which delights us each time as a new revelation."<sup>10</sup>

Tochner writes in a similar vein:

"The polarity in Agnon's writing, the contrasts and contradictions in shape and content which seem to reign over its different parts, are, in fact, a most original expression of totality and exemplary consistency."

One of the younger critics, Hillel Barzel:

"All of Agnon's words are linked, whether in a revealed manner or in a hidden manner, to his total writings." 12

D. Sadan states clearly:

"The distinction between stories of the past and stories of the present is not a substantial one. Elements which function in the former, function in the latter, and the difference in their functioning is due to artistic factors .... A complete difference between the stories will be revealed only to an eye which skims superficially. R. Yudil, and his great grandson Yitzchak Kummer, and a neighbour's neighbour Dr. Ginat and their likes are merely differently expressed branches of one root-essence, which is the riddle and solution of the author." 13

To conclude, let us consider Agnon's own words:

"I do not admit that there is any fundamental difference between 'Sefer-Hama-Asim' (The Book of Deeds - M.Y.H.) and other stories I have written; they are all of one kind. There is no holy and profane' ... in my writings. Why is 'Sefer-Hama-Asim' not realistic? Take the story 'Pat Shlema' ('A Whole Loaf' - M.Y.H.). What is surrealistic about it? Does it not contain a certain realistic description of a Shabbat, of the streets of Jerusalem, of the atmosphere of an eating house? 14

Even a single story must be seen with the background of the writer's entire body of work. The critic must not treat each story separately, deal with it as though it is something in its own right." 15

This is reminiscent of rays of the sun which penetrate through stained glass windows. The same rays, of one source and origin, are reflected to the viewer in different colours. The rays above R. Yudil are as blue and as pure as the sky, while

in 'A Guest for the Night' a dark cloud almost obscures the rays entirely, darkening them, despairing and distressing. In 'Tmol Shilshom' the rays are reflected in yellow and green. Yitzchak Kummer, lost and erring, is wandering in a yellow desert of desolation, blinded by the rays with which he cannot cope, not privileged enough to see the green rays emanating from the fields of Ein Ganim. 'Bilvav Yamim' has the blue of the heavens and the blue of the seas for a backdrop, while 'The Book of Deeds' 'Edo and Enam' and 'Forevermore' are a kelaidoscope of gyrating colours, the demonic movements of which reaches horrifying dimensions in stories like 'The Lady and the Peddlar'.

This mixture of colours might cause confusion to its viewer. But the colours all come from the easel of one painter, the rays all emanate from one sun and the characters are all sketched by one pen of one author.

From the above it is clear that there is a unity to be found underlying Agnon's work. We intend to investigate the nature of this unity. If the unity exists, there will be, in all probability, a central theme. What is that theme?

Before answering that question we must clarify whether an author so fertile in quantity and quality as Agnon, writes to satisfy the artistic needs of himself and his readers, or whether there is a further, practical aim in his writing. In the words of Yeshurun Keshet, is Agnon "an author of 'the contemporary spirit' or of a closed room?"<sup>16</sup>



This question has been asked by many of the critics. They are of divided opinion, and several are undecided. Yeshurun Keshet belongs to the latter group:

"What distinguishes Agnon is that his heart is divided between the two fields, and a kind of competition, or secret war, is raging in his soul always between these two conceptions, each of which attracts him. He leans in the one direction and then in the other, without final decision, because both conceptions are close to his heart and dear to him in equal measure." 17

B. Kurtzweil has an unequivocal opinion:

"Agnon is the first one in our literature who approached his subject, the Jewish reality, as a writer of pure epic, without any didactic intentions, without the cheers of war, without an anti religious effect and without the pathos of a religious zealot." 18

"There is no hint here of a didactic will, which is so typical of our literature in the nineteenth century ... The pure story, the story as the single and final aim, is here the unconscious principle of faith, which overtakes the reader and allows him a sigh of relief at not having become an unwilling partner to assorted quarrelsomeness and argument, to words of preaching and hope, false hope. The Jewish Shtetl in 'Vehaya He-Akov LeMishor' is no didactic laboratory; it is a deep reality of life, demanding understanding and love. He who approaches it in order to investigate its substance must see it objectively, and be removed from the didactic intention as he is removed from romantic sentimentality. For this reason Agnon is as distant from romanticism as he is from the Haskalah (enlightenment - M.Y.H.) approach, which sees first and foremost not phenomena as

they are, but its own desire for change." 19

Several other critics follow Kurtzweil's footsteps, saying "Shai Agnon's stories were created for aesthetic pleasure." 20

S.D. Goitein accepts Kurtzweil's opinion on principle, yet he sees Agnon's stories as a promoter of good deeds:

"One of the ancient Greeks said: 'What is music worthy of its name? Such music of which the listener hears a few notes and immediately jumps up and goes to do acts of courage.' Agnon's stories are similar. They arouse to action. If he sketches a world which is perfect, he drives the reader to perfect himself, and when he sketches a broken, empty world, he drives the reader to fill the void and repair the breakage. He who samples Agnon's stories may expect to be bettered, for such is the nature of a real story, that it makes for a wealth of awakening, a desire for self examination and spiritual elevation. Agnon, whether in his classical form or in his modern and even hyper-modern form, functions in our generation as the great morality books of past generations, such as Sefer Hachasidim of R. Yehuda Hechasid or Sefer Shnei Luchot Habrit of R. Yeshaya Horowitz. If so, didactic? No. A didactic writer is one who has a moral and composes a tale to illustrate it. A true poet is one who rejoices in the telling of a tale, and because he believes and loves, he tells of the objects of his belief and love." 21

In contrast with Kurtzweil and his followers, there is a large school of critics and interpreters who see in Agnon's writing a distinct

didactic intention. And if not that, they see at least a stand taken on the topical contemporary issues. Moreover, many of these critics see Agnon's stand taking on topical issues as being not an indirect expression of the author's view, but a deliberate, premeditated and unequivocal expression of opinion, visible even on the most superficial level of the stories.

The most clear example of this critical approach is that of Meshulam Tochner in connection with the Jerusalemite wise man, composer of 'The Song of the Letters' in 'The Bridal Canopy'. In his essay on the Jerusalemite wise man, Tochner writes that:

"The discovery of the author's point of observation in any of his works is the beginning of the function and the ultimate aim of a critic in the field of fiction." <sup>22</sup>

And he asks:

"In the light of the arising of the State of Israel, may 'The Song of the Letters' remain an entertainment in rhyme, without any topical meaning? It is not possible. Shai Agnon, who lived so intensely within his time, cannot remain without reaction. The tremendous echo of his writings on literature and life demands a reaction. The reaction comes clear, unequivocal, the lesson for many generations." <sup>23</sup>

Tochner proves that Agnon does indeed react to problems occupying the Jewish public in Israel. He does this by comparing texts in different editions of the same stories.

More on the same matter:

"How is didacticism possible in literature?... Any literature with ideas must have an aim, but ways and means to achieve this aim cannot be expected of it. The purpose of literature is to raise problems and expose them from a conventional reality, to point them out to the reader and remove him from apathy and staticity. The process of searching for a solution is in the hands of everyone in the community ... He who reads Agnon's writings carefully, it may be assumed, that the shell of apathy which surrounds him will crack ... The words of the poet will slowly pierce the heart of the reader and will awaken him to think of his future ways, to think of establishing a new scale of values .... the words of the poet are not only tombstones for a past world, but are also milestones for a renewed world of the future." 24

What is the meaning of the story ('Agunot') in connection with the renaissance of the second aliyah? It seems that in this story Agnon expressed his historiosophic approach that ... The Zionist Renaissance must be based on the ways of Judaism, on Torah and belief, but with that must be liberated from the traditional scale of values, headed by learnedness, wealth and greatness in the Diaspora style." 25

The writer emphasizes that the story is based on "transgression and retribution". If there are transgression and retribution, there is a moral, and if there is a moral, there is topicality.

"Blessed intention reigned over Agnon's pen all these years .... it caused the readers of his stories to see themselves better, to respect themselves and like themselves more, to wish to

be that which they are - Jews in whom humanity is rooted so deeply that it cannot be uprooted." 26

From the examples above, it becomes clear that there is no unanimity among the critics as to the topicality in Agnon's writing. Their opinions are wide ranging, starting with those who negate both topicality and didacticism through all possible nuances to those who see a clear didactic intention.

In this paper, we will assume that Agnon's writing has, in addition to its aesthetic and artistic value, also a clearly didactic intention, and in the course of this paper we will attempt to verify this assumption.

There are therefore two basic assumptions at the heart of this paper.

1. There is a unity in Agnon's writing.
2. Agnon had didactic intention.

The object of this paper is to clarify the nature of the unity and the intention: what is a unifying theme in the work, and what does it come to teach?

Our thesis is that Agnon deals with the theme of man's struggle and conflict. His attitude to any character is in direct proportion to its willingness to take upon itself a direct confrontation with the problems which it faces. We will attempt to show that this subject moves throughout Agnon's varied and diversified writings.

It is axiomatic that the most meaningful struggle of any human being, in so far as he is a human being, is with himself. This is generally referred to in our sources<sup>27</sup> as the struggle with Yetzer Hara (the evil inclination).

Agnon denies the supreme power of predestined fate, and does not allow fate to be used as pretext for human weakness. He places man's responsibility for his deeds squarely on his shoulders.

It is interesting to note that the theme of struggle with Yetzer Hara appears at the very early stages of Agnon's writing, though in a simple, childish manner.

In the chapter "Shana Rishona" (First Year) of his book 'Al Shai Agnon', Dov Sadan tries to trace Agnon's beginning as a writer. In his youth, Agnon wrote in two languages - Hebrew and Yiddish, and Sadan quotes him as saying:

"My first printed words were a recommendation of Sefer Minchat Yehuda or Beit Yehuda al Agadot Hashas (5663 - 1903), but I think that prior to that I published in Yiddish a poem on the tales of R. Yosef Della Reina".<sup>28</sup>

R. Yosef Della Reina made great efforts, in the system of practical Kabbala, to bring the Messiah. To this end he had to physically overcome Yetzer Hara and his wife - Samarel and Lilith. After many difficulties and superhuman efforts, he and his disciples managed to discover their hiding place, and there Samarel and Lilith are revealed to them in the form of a dog and a bitch. Thus we see, that even as a child, Agnon was already concerned with the struggle with Yetzer Hara.

In his youth, Agnon wrote poems, the first of which was published in "Hamitzpeh" on 21st Iyar 5664 (6.5.1904). In this poem, the subject is similar but the plane is different. Agnon describes scenes from a house of study on Lag Ba-Omer:

"On the bench of the house of study  
 Stands a small child  
 In his hand arrows, he set his bow  
 and shoots towards Satan." 29

Here too we see young Tzatzkes preoccupied with the idea of struggling with Yetzer Hara. Naturally, the treatment of young Tzatzkes undergoes much sophistication before it becomes the style of a mature Agnon, but the fact remains that the subject is the same.

The reason for this is clear. Agnon grew up in a God fearing home, one in which man's aim was clear and fixed and static: The worship of God with all one's heart and all one's might. The difficulties facing those who aim for this, took on, in the mind of the young poet, the form of Satan. Hence the small child shoots his arrows at a physical Satan.

The fact that Jews' evil deeds delay the coming of Messiah is a well accepted fact among God fearing communities, such as the one in which Agnon grew up. In the story of R. Yosef Della Reina, there is an attempt to remove evil and so redeem the Divine Presence, which is in exile as long as the children of Israel are dispersed. In the poem on 'Lag BaOmer' too, the concept of fighting Satan is joined to the concept of pleasing the Almighty. It ends with:

"And thousands of eyes will gaze down from above,  
 Tears will escape from high  
 Small child! Great in strength!  
 You will yet show wonders to your people."

The small child, great in strength, did indeed show wonders to his people in the form of the literary enterprise of the Nobel Laureate Shai Agnon, who carried with him from his home the concept of man's struggle, which he elaborated and polished and to which he devoted a significant portion of his writings.

Agnon's writing can be compared to the mountain stream, which flows sometimes above ground and sometimes beneath rocks. The object of this paper is to show that those of its qualities which are visible to the eye when the stream is exposed, exist and are active even when it is obscured from vision.



# REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "PREFACE"

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2. To date, in the "Complete works of Agnon" (A series of eight volumes published in his lifetime) and in the 4 volumes published posthumously, some one million, eight hundred thousand words have been printed. For comparison: the sum total of Shakespeare's writings contains some one and a quarter million words.
3. Y. Arnon: Introduction to: Bibliographia al Shmuel Yosef Agnon viyetzirotav. See also:  
D. Lazar, Maariv 20. 2. 1970, p. 31
4. See below p. for date of 'Hanidach'
5. Ir Umelo - a, p. 9
6. A.M. Lifshitz: Ketavim p. 209 These words were first published in 1926.
7. B. Kurtzweil: Masot p. 143
8. ibid. p. 17
9. ibid. p. 141. See also, pp. 37, 50, 69, 76, 107 and others.
10. Y. Fichman: Im Keri-at Sipurei Agnon, in Moznayim, Tishrei 5695, p. 82.
11. Pesher Agnon, p. 27 See also p. 63
12. H. Barzel: Me-asef., in Moznayim, Cheshvan 5724, p. 447
13. Al Tipa Achat in Al Shai Agnon p. 61-62

14. Zvi E. Kurtzweil, I have lunch with S.J. Agnon in The Jewish Chronicle Supplement, 25.2. 1955, p. VII.
15. D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-Al Peh, p. 77  
For more on the unity of Agnon's writing see:
  1. Y. Keshet: Panav Vegabo in Moznayim, Shvat 5731, p. 208-211
  2. S. Kramer in Moznayim, Av 5727, p. 166
  3. E. Netzer: Hasipur Agunot UmeKomo Bemichlol Yetzirato Shel Shai Agnon, in Bisdeh Chemed, Shvat-Adar 5731, p. 294
  4. G. Shaked: Be-ayot Mivniyot Biyetzirato Shel Agnon, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 310 ff
  5. S. Urbach, in Tarbut, Sivan Tamuz 5708, p. 61
16. Y. Keshet: Havdalot p. 105
17. *ibid.* p. 104-105
18. B. Kurtzweil: Masot p. 10
19. *ibid.* p. 26-27
20. A.Y. Brawer: Mevo-ot Historiyim Vegeographiyim Lechitvei Agnon, in Yuval Shai, p. 38. See also:  
Y. Rabinowitz: Darkei Agnon Be-itzuv Giboro Hasifruti, in Shorashim Umegamot p. 276.  
M. Shamir: Hatarmil Hakaru-a, in Yuval Shai p. 81, 82.
21. S.D. Goitein in LeAgnon Shai, p. 27-45
22. M. Tochner: Pesher Agnon p. 50
23. *ibid.* p. 59
24. Y. Friedlander: Haklal Vehaprat Besipurei Agnon, in Yuval Shai, p. 75-77
25. A. Golan: Hasipur 'Agunot' Veba-alayah Hashniya, in Moznayim, Shvat 5731, p. 222

26. S.Y. Pnueli: Agnon Betoch Zmano, in Moznayim, Av Elul 5718, p. 22 and For others who see in Agnon's writing a practic topicality, in varying degrees, see:
- M. Buber. Hamesaper Besha-a zo, in Yuval Shai p. 11
- Y. Katz: Agnon mul Hamevucha Hadatit, in LeAgnon Shai p. 163 ff.
- G. Katznelson: 'Agunot' Shel Agnon - Gilgulav Shel Nosach, in Moznayim, Av-Elul 5728, p. 164.
- D. Sadan: Introduction to M. Tochner's 'Peshet Agnon' p. 7-23
- D. Sadan: Al Shai Agnon p. 105-121
- A. Schweid: Hasipur HaAgnoni Kema-aseh Tikun, in Molad, Sivan, 5730, p. 191-193
- A. Tzoref: Beshulei Siporet Veshira, p. 152
- Y. Ziv-Av: Al Sipurim Usefarim in Gazit, Nissan Tamuz 5730, p. 12.
27. For the influence of the sources on Agnon and for their importance in understanding him correctly, see below p.305 ff
28. Dov Sadan: Al Shai Agnon p. 125 The year 5663 is 1903 A.D. Agnon was fifteen years old at the time .  
R. Yosef Della Reina apparently lived in the fifteenth century. The actions related in the poem were carried out around 1470, in order to bring forward the date of the coming of the Messiah. According to various calculations, Messiah was scheduled to come in 1490. See encyclopaedia Judaica Vol. 10, pp. 240-241.
29. D. Sadan: Al Shai Agnon p. 130-131.

CHAPTER ONE

ONE WHOSE NAME WE HAVE FORGOTTEN

## "SOMEONE WHOSE NAME WE HAVE FORGOTTEN"

"Bilvav Yamim" ("In the heart of seas") is different from all Agnon's other works. It is the only story in which he himself appears fully named: Reb Shmuel Yosef, the son of Reb Shalom Mordechai Halevi - one of the NILBAVIM (The enthused or inspired ones) who go to Eretz Yisrael. He is accompanied by his wife Esther on this journey.<sup>1</sup>

It is accepted that Agnon himself appears in many of his works in various disguises,<sup>2</sup> but "Bilvav Yamim" is distinguished by his undisguised appearance. The similarity between R. Shmuel Yosef Halevi, a figure in this story, and R. Shmuel Yosef Halevi the author is real and concrete, not merely external and formal:

".... who was raised in the legends of the Land of Israel, those legends in which the name of the Holy One, blessed be he, is hallowed; and when he commenced lauding the land, people could see as it were the name of the living God engraved on the tip of his tongue."<sup>3</sup> "R. Shmuel Yosef, the son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi is favourably mentioned as one who sweetened their sufferings with tales ... ." "Happy is R. Shmuel Yosef, who at all times can relate the good deeds which the Holy One, blessed be he, does for Israel."<sup>4</sup>

The fact, then, of Agnon's personal appearance begs explanation. When we realize that the particular event took place before the author's birth, this fact is even more startling. This problem of the date of the voyage of the nilbavim needs further clarification.

The two stories "Hanidach" and "Bilvav Yamim" are related by characters who appear in each. R. Moshe, - one of the nilbavim, is referred to as the brother of R. Gershon who appears

in "Hanidach". From the details given in "Hanidach" it is clear that R. Moshe must have been a child of about 10 years - and the date of the events of the story has been given as 1815.<sup>5</sup>

Although we cannot be precise about the numbers of years that have passed, we can estimate 40 because here he appears as the father of daughters who have already been married some time, while in "Hanidach" he appeared as a child of 10:

"Sarah turned her head towards her husband - R. Moshe, as he sat with his head resting on his arm, holding a book in his hand. Her mind turned back to her two daughters whom she had left behind in Buczacz, now, she thought to herself, their husbands are just coming to eat their suppers, and maybe they too have boiled buckwheat in milk and are shaking fine sugar over the porridge to sweeten the food; but the men do not even notice the women's labour, but sit down at table and look into a book; sons-in-law like father-in-law." <sup>6</sup>

And if we accept the words of Satan to R. Moshe literally: "An old one like you"; <sup>7</sup> and if we understand the word "old" according to the Mishna "at sixty a man attains old age", <sup>8</sup> then 50 years have passed since "Hanidach" and the voyage must have taken place in 1865. <sup>9</sup> Agnon however, was born in 1888.

So we see that the voyage of the nilbavim took place before Agnon's birth but the author nevertheless managed to overcome the time - obstacle in order to participate personally in this important voyage.

He must have attached particular significance to it. What then was this significance?

A superficial reading would lead us to believe that Agnon wished to emphasize the importance of Eretz Yisrael and the supreme

importance of going to live there.<sup>10</sup> However, this importance has been stressed in many of his stories without his personal appearance. Such an explanation, therefore does not wholly satisfy - and we must seek a more convincing interpretation at a deeper level.

Much of the narrative revolves around the fact that Chanania joins the nilbavim in order to complete the MINYAN (quorum of ten needed for prayer):

".... while they rejoiced in him because he would complete the minyan and they could pray as a congregation on their journey."<sup>11</sup>

Why should this cause joy? Could there not be a minyan without Chanania? Let us examine the list of the nilbavim:<sup>12</sup>

- a. Old R. Shlomo
- b. R. Alter, the slaughterer and inspector
- c. R. Alter, the teacher
- d. R. Pesach, the warden
- e. R. Yosef Meir - who had divorced his wife
- f. R. Moshe - the brother of Reb Gershom
- g. R. Yehudah Mendel - one of the followers of Rabbi Uriel
- h. "Someone whose name we have forgotten"
- i. Leibush, the butcher
- j. Reb Shmuel Yosef, the son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi.

We have ten Jews - a full minyan. Why then the joy that Chanania would complete the quorum?

And more seriously yet: when they had boarded the ship and Chanania was not with them

".... they stood up to pray and saw that they were lacking one for a quorum. Chanania, who had made the journey with them, had vanished. .... So everyone prayed separately."<sup>13</sup>

Is this possible? Is it possible that ten Jews would rationally and reasonably stand and pray separately when in fact they have a full

minyan ? - Simply because of a counting error ?

Even if we can accept an 'arithmetical error' on the part of the nilbavim, is it possible for Agnon to have erred? Agnon, after all, is well known for his precision of style and subtle discrete presentation. Agnon himself says of himself:

"I am a buchhalter (book-keeper) for dozens of characters, people of Buczacz, "Shira", short stories, and I have to reckon all and remember all...."

It is quite unacceptable that the 'buchhalter' should have erred so.

On re-examination of our list we discover an anomaly. Nine of the nilbavim are recognizable and known. When they are first introduced we learn not only their names but also who they are. As the story unfolds they become tangible and real. Many previously unknown details are added and their images take shape clearly. We are even told of their struggles with "YETZER HARA (the evil inclination) - who attempts to bedevil their journey.<sup>15</sup> These nine become real and concrete figures. Their place in the narrative is assured - whether in Buczacz, on the voyage, in Eretz Yisrael or in Jerusalem - as legitimate, living figures who breathe the aura of the story, who influence it and are influenced by it. All the above is a description of the nine. Whereas one of the nilbavim is essentially different from his fellow voyagers, and he is "someone whose name we have forgotten". Not only have we "forgotten his name" at his inclusion in the list but for the remainder of the story we are oblivious of him, with two exceptions: Once when he asks "why did Esau merit having his head buried in the cave of Machpelah?"<sup>16</sup> and secondly at prayer at the Western Wall when he was honoured with the rolling up of the Torah scroll.<sup>17</sup> Despite his three appearances in the story - at the beginning, in the middle and at the end - he remains an unknown, obscure figure.



Who is this "someone whose name we have forgotten"? Can we discover any additional details about him? These questions lead us to an even more searching one: Since when has the memory of the author, "who forgot the name" of one of his fellow voyagers, become so weak? There is sufficient to associate the 'memory lapse' with the 'arithmetical error' and to project the findings of one on to the other. In the same way as our logic cannot tolerate Agnon's 'arithmetical error' so it cannot accept his "memory lapse" as genuine.

Before we elucidate the symbolism, meaning and suggested interpretations for the solution of this problem, to the approach to "Bilvav Yamim" and its interpretation, we can reasonably suggest that Agnon deliberately set the reader these 'traps'. However, he set them clearly and simply and in an easily discernable manner. We have before us then, two problems:

- a. How did the nilbavim not have a minyan without Chanania when they in fact numbered ten?
- b. Who is "someone whose name we have forgotten"?

The solution to the problems lies in these questions.

We will begin by clarifying the identity of "someone whose name we have forgotten".

Does this fact, - that Agnon has seemingly forgotten the name of one of his characters - recur in other works or is this a unique occurrence?

In the chapter "Awake or Dreaming" we read:

"the hall was empty. There wasn't a soul in the hall. Then the one that I know but whose name I have forgotten, arrived." <sup>18</sup> In "Another TALIT" (prayer-shawl) it is told: "And a certain man, whose name I do not want to mention, is standing on the top step ...." <sup>19</sup>

In this case the narrator knows the man's name but for some reason he attaches importance to avoiding mentioning the man's name.

And what is this importance?

The common denominator in these two instances is the demonic atmosphere surrounding him of the forgotten and unexpressed name.

In "Another Talit" we are concerned with the narrator's Talit, "that same Talit that I had left at the house of study of my grandfather, peace be upon him."

That is to say, his grandfather had passed away; nevertheless "when I entered, my grandfather lifted his head from under his Talit and looked about to find me a place."

The group of old men sitting with the narrator's grandfather is described as follows:

"Each one was different from the other and needless-to-say, from all other men. Their faces were withered and their beards like sticks of cinamon, and their eyes without eyelashes and the pupils of their eyes were red ..... how did all these gather together in one place at the house of study of my grandfather, and why are their appearances so strange." <sup>20</sup>

In this strange gallery the narrator tries to find a place. He leaves the house of study, returns and realizes

"that they had brought benches to the house of study and had placed them to the left of the Holy Ark, one above the other like the steps of the bath-house and a man whose name I do not want to mention is standing on the top step with something resembling a baker's

hat on his head and singing tunes which are not of Yom Kippur. And a young lad, his son or his grandson stands next to him and gesticulates to the tunes in a foolish fashion and half the house of study watches this approvingly. How did they come here and when did they come here?"<sup>21</sup>

This grotesque picture makes the reader shudder. The narrator sees the one whose name he does not want to mention, having interrupted the Yom Kippur Fast once he had left the house of study during the prayers. And the eating itself was demonic and crazed:

"I have set apart my teeth from the fruits, but they were regurgitating from the jar and pressing against my mouth and bubbling up." <sup>22</sup>

And that man who was singing tunes not of Yom Kippur and his son or grandson who was gesticulating foolishly - who is he?

We can accept a slight hint about the nature of this man from the events that befell the narrator after this man left the house of study:

"In the meanwhile they descended and left ..... how did that man leave during the prayers ..... my grandfather looked at me again. I hastened and put my hand into a hole in the table and took my Talit out of it, I had searched there for my Talit many times and not found it, but now I found it." <sup>23</sup>

For this there must be a reason! As long as this man was in the house of study the narrator was unable to find his Talit. As soon as he had left, his Talit was found. How did "this man" influence the narrator and manage to prevent him finding his Talit? Moreover, to what end did "this man and his son or grandson" stand and disturb the worshippers on the Holy Day of Atonement with "tunes that were not of Yom Kippur" and with "foolish gesticulations"?!

It would seem that the role of the one "whose name the narrator doesn't wish to mention" is becoming clearer and in the light of his role we may draw the correct conclusion concerning his identity.

A very similar atmosphere also pervades "A Guest for a Night". A chapter in "A Guest for a Night" is similar in its atmosphere to "The Book of Deeds".<sup>24</sup> The real and the unreal intermingle. Both of Raphael's hands are cut off and he cannot lay TEFILIN.... father promised to make rubber hands ..... Arela is bemoaning her father because he can't find his arm ..... the Tefilin meant for the head he puts on his head and that meant for the hand he laid on the arm of the dead soldier he found in the trench.<sup>25</sup> And Leibtche who rewrites the Torah in rhyme is about to build a SUCCAH on top of the narrator's Succah. Finally he covers the Succah with a torn sheet ..... the narrators wife appears suddenly from nowhere .... Schitzling also comes;

"how tired his smile, how weary his clothes, how flattened the hat on his head ...." <sup>26</sup>

Into this unreal, dim, demonic atmosphere enters "someone whom I know and whose name I do not know". The atmosphere is heavy and oppressive.

And concerning the identity of "someone whom I know and whose name I do not know", Agnon brings us subtly in "A Guest for a Night" a few well-concealed details, which are nevertheless important in themselves. If we accept that Agnon derives much of his approach from traditional sources and we accept the assumption that this is projected in his writings, we will discover certain details that can aid us in reconstructing the identity of this mysterious figure.

"Every day his face is different; today he had the face both of a Japanese and a Tartan,"

writes Agnon about "someone he knows but whose name he doesn't know."

Is there any being in our sources who could suitably be described as "every day his face is different"? - A creature of many faces with the ability to suit his appearance to the needs of the moment? Indeed, there is such a figure and it is well-known in the sources:

"Such are the skills of Yetzer Hara; today he says 'do this' and on the morrow he says 'do that'...." <sup>28</sup>

"Yetzer Hara - his beginning is sweet and his end bitter"; <sup>29</sup> "In the distant future, the Holy One, blessed be He, will summon Yetzer Hara .... the righteous will see him as a high mountain while the wicked will see him as a fine thread" <sup>30</sup>

"At first Yetzer Hara seems like a cobweb and later resembles a wagon rope." <sup>31</sup>

"At first he is a guest; later he becomes the host." <sup>32</sup>

We have before us a many sided character who changes his image according to the prevailing needs and conditions. "Today he had the face both of a Japanese and a Tartan." On the basis of this illustration alone we have a clear indication of the identity of the mysterious figure "someone whom I know but whose name I do not know."

An additional point worthy of mention is the age of "someone whom I know and whose name I do not know".

"His years were 30 - a year less or a year more." <sup>33</sup>

The narrator had just told us "41 years had passed me...." <sup>34</sup> The age-difference between the two therefore, is 10-12 years. And this fits the Midrashic statement "From the age of 10 onwards one develops Yetzer Hara." <sup>35</sup>

It is quite clear then, from all the above, that both "someone whose name I do not wish to mention" in "Another Talit" and "someone whom I know and whose name I do not know" in "A Guest for a Night" are but one and the same Yetzer Hara, Satan.

We may note that in "A Guest for a Night" there exists another figure not mentioned by name. This character is Agnon's "neighbour".:

"I greeted Rachel with a 'Mazal Tov' and turned away my eyes and said to my neighbour (The one who dwells with me) I have stipulated that you shall not entice me with married women." <sup>36</sup> - and

"My neighbour who dwells with me whispered to me 'if it were not for Yerucham Chofshi, Rachel would be free and you and I could stare at her. I said to my neighbour: Well said. Rachel was a pretty girl. My neighbour immediately began describing Rachel's countenance in all sorts of attractive ways. I said to him: Are you mocking me? He said: Because you attribute my deeds to the Holy One, Blessed be He. It is not God who drew Rachel's image for you; I did. I said: You drew the image of Yerucham Chofshi's wife for me; and our God drew the image of Rachel, the innkeeper's youngest daughter, for me." <sup>37</sup>

In both these passages we see very clearly an open struggle within the narrator's soul, against the temptations of Yetzer Hara - the one who is called "neighbour". There are many similarities between the 2 characters - "the one whose name is forgotten and not pronounced" and the "neighbour". Both appear anonymously; both disturb the fulfillment of MITZVOT and even openly entice to commit transgressions. It seems clear that the 2 characters are identical in their objectives and their aspirations. In one

case only, has Agnon lifted the shroud of secrecy from the mystical figure of the "neighbour":

"After I parted from Ignatz, I said to myself 'I should not have made him cry; if I had given him charity money bit by bit, the poor man's heart would not have been excited and he would not have cried'. My neighbour said: (He is the Satan, he is Yetzer Hara who does not allow me to enjoy any mitzva that I carry out.) Today he cries for you gave him all your money; tomorrow you will not have what to give him - and he will laugh." <sup>39</sup>

Here we have an explicit comment. Agnon has unequivocally identified the neighbour as Yetzer Hara.

We have shown that the "one whose name we do not mention" is Yetzer Hara, according to his character and activities. But the circle of our argument will not be complete if we do not show that the naming of this figure is constantly avoided. Was Agnon following a law, custom or practice in avoiding the mentioning of Yetzer Hara by name?

We see that he was. The sources that deal with this subject are varied and range from the early Talmudic-Midrashic period with some Biblical references, right through to recent Rabbinic literature. The Talmud identifies Satan with Yetzer Hara and the Angel of Death, and draws our attention to the threefold attributes of that Being:

"It (he) comes down and incites to wickedness; goes up and infuriates, receives permission and removes the soul." <sup>40</sup>

The following are examples of injunctions to avoid naming this threefold being:

- a) "One must not give Satan an opening by evoking him through speech." <sup>41</sup>
- b) i "The wicked arch-angel Samael is the head of all devils (satanim)" <sup>42</sup>
- ii "Samael is the arch-angel of Esau" <sup>43</sup> - and as such features as a divine figure for the descendents of Esau. Therefore the prohibition of
- iii "and make no mention of the name of other Gods - neither let it be heard out of they mouth" <sup>44</sup> - applies to him.
- c) According to the tractate Sanhedrin, one may not discuss anything concerning the devil lest one endangers oneself. <sup>45</sup>

There is an additional aspect drawn from the literature of the mystics and widely prevalent in Chasidic lore: that every Jew has a 'divine spark', and that whenever he is in contact - physical, mental or spiritual - with anything or anyone else - something of that spark of holiness is transmitted to the other, thereby promoting its very existence. It follows therefore, that one may not even mention the name of the forces of evil lest one thereby support their existence. <sup>46</sup>

In colloquial Hebrew too there are special expressions that were coined in order to avoid mentioning the Devil by name. <sup>47</sup> Agnon himself mentions several times that the name of the Devil should not be pronounced:

"We in Galicia were careful not to pronounce the name of Kotzk (name of a place) for it is well-known that Kotzk is the name of Devil." <sup>48</sup>



It is clear from all these examples that "someone whose name we have forgotten" is not an ordinary, conventional traveller, but is the Yetzer Hara, the Satan, who accompanies the nilbavim on their journey to the Holy Land.

The fact that Satan has accompanied the nilbavim - and Agnon - on their journey to Eretz Yisrael is also mentioned elsewhere. In his essay "Analysis of the story 'A Whole Loaf' as a model for the interpretation of the 'Book of Deeds'". B. Kurzweil identifies one of the characters, Gresler, with Satan.<sup>49</sup> In the same story we read:

"When I came to Eretz Yisrael, whom did I first meet? - Gresler. For in the same boat that I travelled, he too travelled."<sup>50</sup>

The story 'A Whole Loaf' is related in the first person. Moreover, there are certain biographical facts which correlate with Agnon's personal life - e.g. the burning of his house in Germany.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, in 'A Whole Loaf' Agnon confirms what he only hints at in 'Bilvav Yamim' - namely: He went to Eretz Yisrael and the Yetzer Hara accompanied him.

If this description of the identity of "someone whose name we have forgotten" and the problem of avoiding mention of his name has been somewhat lengthy, this is because there is particular significance to establishing the identity of traveller number 8. The need to establish this identity is essential, not only for a proper understanding of 'Bilvav Yamim' but because it has far reaching ramifications for Agnon's work as a whole.

We return to our original questions:

- a) Why was Chanania needed to complete the minyan when there were already ten men present?
- b) Who is "someone whose name we have forgotten"?
- c) How do we explain Agnon's 'forgetfulness'?

Because we have uncovered the true identity of "someone whose name we have forgotten", we can now understand that the nilbavim in fact numbered nine and that Chanania was necessary to complete the quorum of ten.

However, the very nature of our solution presents us with an even greater problem: Why did the nilbavim need such a companion? - and why did Shmuel Yosef Agnon - in the story 'Rabbi Shmuel Yosef, the son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi' - need such a co-traveller on his journey to Eretz Yisrael? Moreover - are the nine aware of the presence of this figure or is his existence known only to the reader? These additional questions will be dealt with later.

At this stage we can accept the simple but essential fact that Agnon was fully aware of the number of nilbavim and the true identity of each. If he chose to obscure this in any way, it was with the conscious intent of suggesting the existence of additional layers of meaning. Agnon himself refers explicitly to the additional layers towards the end of 'Bilvav Yamim':

"Some will read my book as a man reads legends, while others will read it and derive benefit for themselves" 52

But what is this benefit he referred to? Agnon himself quoting from Psalms provides the answer in the final sentence of the story:

"But those who wait for the Lord, they shall inherit the land," <sup>53</sup>

that is to say, that a proper understanding of the story at its most meaningful level will elucidate for the reader the narrator's view of the way "to inherit the land."

In the above analysis we have seen the significance of Agnon's tactic of providing the reader with clues for problems in the story itself. We have seen how the actual passenger list served as a corner stone for the process of unravelling the layers of meaning. His strategy would seem analogous to that of a treasure hunt - one follows the clues in a particular sequence in order to find the treasure. However it is clear that without uncovering the first clue, the successful decoding of the rest cannot follow according to the rules of the 'inventor' of the game.

In the case of "Bilvav Yamim", the "discovery of the eleventh passenger", "he whose name we have forgotten" was the first clue. What followed as a result is significant for the understanding of both Agnon's method and his subject matter, throughout his writing, as will be dealt with in the forthcoming chapters.

It would seem then that we must proceed in this direction for the remainder of our analysis, and this will only be possible if we remain completely faithful to the Agnonian text.

REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "SOMEONE WHOSE NAME WE HAVE FORGOTTEN"

1. Elu Ve'Elu p. 490
2. See below p. 88, 234  
     See also      i. M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 50-61  
                             concerning the identity of the  
                             Jerusalemite sage. Tochner identifies  
                             him with Agnon.  
                           ii A.M. Lipschitz, Shai Agnon, Ketavim p. 215  
                           iii G. Shaked, Omanut Hasipur shel Agnon pp. 20
3. Elu Ve'Elu p. 490
4. ibid. pp. 510 - 511

"Critics have already noticed this figure whose countenance is utterly ideal - as if it were the projection of a personal autobiographical wish of the author" (S. Verses - Sipur Vi' shorsho p. 214)

"This aesthetic means (the personal participation in the story - M.Y.H.) is used most explicitly in "Bilvav Yamim" ..... through his joining them and their deeds by name and with his full identity" (M. Tochner Pesher Agnon p. 60)

5. Elu Ve'Elu p. 27

The date given in R. Avigdor's letter according to the numerical value of the Hebrew alphabet brings us to 5575 which is equivalent to 1815.

A.Y. Brawer in Yuval Shai pp. 36, 37, sets the date at 1775 - but his reasons are not clear.

6. Elu Ve'Elu p. 502
7. ibid p. 521
8. Ethics of the Fathers 5, 21
9. This would seem to contradict the view of S. Verses (Sipur Ve'Shorsho p. 209) who proposed the latest possible date as 1858 because the death of an external character, who appears in the story, occurred in 1858. Agnon himself admits that he is not necessarily precise concerning the chronology of the peripheral characters who may appear in his works.

Agnon himself says "You criticize Agnon and find in his writing whatever you find; I would write a most severe criticism about him. All the mistakes and weak points - I know. The Rabbi of Apta died a year before Yudel Chassid left on his travells (D. Kena'ani quoting Agnon in Shai Agnon Be'al Pe p. 34) (Nevertheless the Rabbi of Apta appears throughout the adventures of R. Yudel Chassid).

10. See various opinions cited by S. Verses in Sipur Veshorsho pp. 201 - 203.
11. Elu Ve'Elu p. 485
12. *ibid.* pp. 489 - 490
13. *ibid.* pp. 514
14. D. Kena'ani, Shai Agnon Be'al Pe p. 32
15. Elu Ve'Elu p. 496, 521
16. *ibid.* pp. 500
17. *ibid.* pp. 546
18. A Guest for a Night p. 360, 361
19. Samuch Ve'nire p. 202 - 204
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.* p. 204
22. *ibid.* p. 203
23. *ibid.* p. 204
24. Samuch Ve'nire
25. A Guest for a Night p. 358
26. *ibid.* p. 359, 360
27. *ibid.* p. 361
28. Shabbath 105,2
29. Yer. Shabbath 14
30. Succah 52,1

31. *ibid.*
32. Ber. Raba 22, 11 See also Sanhedrin 95, 1; 107, 1  
Tanchuma Vayera 22.
33. A Guest for a Night p. 361
34. *ibid.* p. 356
35. Tanchuma Ber. 7

There are certain statements in the Talmud and Midrashim to the effect that Yetzer Hara enters a person at birth, and according to some, even earlier - at conception. Here the reference seems to be to the popular idea, associated with the age of Bar Mitzva (13 years) - at which a person becomes responsible for his deeds. (The earthly court metes out punishment from the age of 13 - Zohar, Vayikra 118, 8).

See also Sanhedrin 91, 2; Ber. Raba 94; Kohelet Raba 90; and Avot d' R. Nathan 16.

36. A Guest for a Night p. 203
37. *ibid.* p. 345
38. Agnon adds this in brackets and reveals that which he had concealed throughout the book.
39. A Guest for a Night p. 423, 424
40. Baba Batra 16, 1 See also Targum Yonathan, Ber 3, 9 and Ketuboth 8, 2
41. Berachot 19, 1; 60, 1
42. D' varim Raba 11, 6
43. Tanchuma, Vayishlach 8
44. Shmot 23, 13
45. Sanhedrin 101, 1
46. R. Zvi Elimelech of Dinor Agra D'Pirka p. 3
47. i.e. Shin Daleth instead of Shed (devil) or Samech Mem instead of Samael (King of the devils).
48. Ad Heina p. 156, 157. See also Elu Ve'Elu p. 96  
M. Tochner Pesher Agnon p. 72
49. B. Kurzweil Masot p. 86 - 94

50. Samuch Ve'Nire p. 149
51. D. Ken'nani, Shai Agnon Be-Al De p. 22
52. Elu Ve'Elu p. 550
53. ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CHANANYA



## CHANANYA

Agnon's advice at the end of Bilvav Yamim, concerning the benefit which is to be gained from reading the story on all possible levels, should be applied not only to the contents but also to the style of the story. In the style, too, many levels are discernable.

The style of Bilvav Yamim, being the style of a simple tale about God fearing folk, may lead the reader to believe that he is indeed faced by such a story. The fact that it is interwoven with tales of miracles which occurred to way farers of the past - from King Solomon through to R. Shmelke of Nikolsburg, further enhances this assumption.<sup>1</sup>

However, if we judge Bilvav Yamim in the light of it's contents, it becomes clear that only one miracle occurs through the unrevelling of the plot - that which happens to Chananya.

"Thereupon the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave Chananya the idea of spreading out his kerchief on the sea and sitting upon it. So he spread his kerchief and sat upon it. The kerchief promptly floated off to sea, carrying him upon it all the way to Eretz Yisrael"<sup>2</sup>

Other than the miracle which happens to Chananya, all the others mentioned in the story are events of the past.

True, the attraction and drawing of the nilbavim for Eretz Yisrael seem ideal and idealistic, but they are a far cry from being a miracle.

A thorough reading reveals that Agnon deliberately points out that there are no other miracles in the story. The description of practical details prior to leaving home, the wandering from village to village and from country to country, the sailing on the ship and, above all, the description of the nilbavim's trials and sufferings upon reaching their destination, Jerusalem - all these are intended to place us on solid ground, so that we see their ALIYAH as practical, earthly, realistic, not miraculous.<sup>3</sup>

True, the atmosphere is entirely one of piety. All that is done, is done by the will of God, and the nilbavim do nothing without invoking his name. But there are no miracles, although there is much talk of them. The following is a description of a "miracle":

"But Milka silenced them, saying, women, you are are ungrateful, for is the Holy One, Blessed be He, showing us so few signs and wonders?"<sup>4</sup>

The above would lead us to expect the enumeration of miracles befalling them during their travels. Instead:

"He put the understanding in our hearts to go to Eretz Yisrael, and led us peacefully and safely

across the land, and set us on a good way with no obstacles or mishaps, and provided us with a ship to set sail on the sea, and took a wind out of His treasury to set the ship going. Then when the sea began quaking around us, He silenced it and ordered the Prince of the Sea to control his anger, which he did, so that the water began moving gently again, and in a days time He will be fetching us to Eretz Yisrael. And you say that He is not showing us any signs of His goodness! .... Yes, said R. Alter the teacher, thats the way to talk, the way Milka talks. By your lives, while she was speaking every limb of mine could feel the miracles that has been done for us."

Miracles? A paraphrase - omit a few words yet describe the same details - will make Milka's story sound not at all like a miracle tale, but rather like words of an ordinary traveller detailing his trip to his friends. Each one of us, after crossing the great sea for the first time, would probably recount the tale as Milka did. None of the events she describes falls within the Ben Yehuda dictionaries definitions "miracle - a marvel performed by a supernatural force" <sup>5</sup>

The contemporary reader has therefore to make a clear distinction between his conception of the word "miracle", and that of the nilbavim, who regarded every act of God - sunrise, sunset, the blowing of the wind and the roaring of the sea, as miracles.

With this background of practical activities of the nilbavim, Chananya's miracle gains added prominence, and Agnon emphasizes the magnitude of the miracle by camouflaging, not very subtly, certain points which he wishes to emphasize.

After recounting the reasons for which Chananya missed the sailing of his ship, Agnon says:

"These are ever so many tales of salvation, each finer than the next; like the story of the man who was lost in the desert. Suddenly, a huge bird lifted him on its wings and in a single hour flew with him to his house, a distance it would have taken him several years to journey. But no bird came to Chananya." <sup>6</sup>

The concluding sentence of this section seems to contradict the continuation of our story. Chananya too, passed the sea miraculously, and does it matter whether he reached his destination on the wings of a huge bird, or upon a kerchief spread out upon the sea?

Then Agnon goes even further by reminding us of the miracle connected with King Solomon's mantle.

"An even greater wonder was the mantle of King Solomon ..... Since nobody in the world ever knew how to sit upon it, except Solomon and his four princes..."

Well? Surely Chananya's kerchiefs miraculous transportation qualities are no less than those of the royal mantle? And we should not suspect Agnon of drawing only on the distant past for evidence, for:

".... even in the generation before our own, miracles were performed upon the water.... crossed the river Danube in a trough in a dangerous season. But where is such a trough to be found nowadays."

There is no need for such a trough. Chananya's kerchief is there to carry him across the great sea.

There seems to be a contradiction. Apparently, the tale of the huge bird which didn't come, and of the mantle and trough which are no more, should instil grave concern as to the success of Chananya's aliyah. Yet on the same page we read of his miracle if so, why the grave concern?

In fact, there is no concern. The description of the miracles which are no more, can be understood as indicating that you and I and the nilbavim cannot expect a miracle, for miracles do not occur. Whoever wants to reach Eretz Yisrael must do so in a natural-earthly manner, and must pay "the taxes required by the King of Yishmael" <sup>7</sup> must "see where the sweet water was drawn from and where wood was got for cooking" <sup>8</sup> The nilbavim themselves understand that they are not to expect unnatural miracles - they are going to Eretz Yisrael, and there too, people eat and drink. The land was not, in the words of R. Yenuda Mendil the Chassid "given to the ministering angels". Or, in the words of R. Pesach the warden to his wife:

"What do you suppose, Tzirel, said I to her, that the Land of Israel is made up of bits of paper on which holy names are inscribed? There as well as here you will find houses to live in, and there as well as here, fat soups are not made from the juice of Hoshanah willows." <sup>9</sup>

This is clearly a sober outlook of practical people who know what to expect. They do not expect miracles, but regard every deed of God as one. <sup>10</sup>

With Chananya it is different. His aliyah is miraculous. To increase the contrast between his aliyah and that of the nilbavim, Agnon simply compares the miracle of Chananya's aliyah, in turn, with the miracle of the huge bird and of King Solomon's mantle, and he compares

Chananya with R. Shmelke of Nikolsburg and with his saintly pupil, R. Moshe Leib of Sasov.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of Chananya's miraculous aliyah is therefore to serve as a background for contrast with the nilbavim's natural aliyah.

In other words, there are two forms of aliyah in our story:

1. Natural - that of the nilbavim
2. Miraculous - that of Chananya.

The nilbavim, of whom the author is one, go to Israel naturally, and this serves as a declaration, by Shmuel Yosef Agnon, the author, and by R. Shmuel Yosef, son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi, one of the nilbavim, to all OLIM in all generations, that aliyah must be done through the initiative of the Olim themselves, out of their own free will, whilst dealing with all technicalities and trivialities - those which occupied the nilbavim prior to their aliyah, during their journey, and after reaching their destination.<sup>12</sup>

At this stage, the reader asks: why was Chananya so privileged as to journey miraculously, while his fellows had to undergo the hardships of travel?

We have to become better acquainted with Chananya, and in fact, some of the questions that were asked about the eighth traveller, he "whose name we have forgotten"<sup>13</sup> are valid concerning Chananya, too.

From whence came Chananya?

His sudden appearance is shrouded in obscurity.

".... a certain man named Chananya found his way to their house of study .... Where were you? they asked. Where was I? he answered, and where was I not?"<sup>14</sup>

When he agrees to tell of his past he does it in a mystifying way:

"At first I went from my town to another town,  
and from that town to yet another."

This information is not at all enriching and in fact, throughout Chananya's stay with the nilbavim, we follow his deeds and learn of his dexterity and other qualities, but we learn very little of his private life. His fellow travellers know just as little about him - in a letter to "the society of comrades, the Chassidim who dwell in the city of Buczacz", R. Shmuel Yosef son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi writes of Chananya's disappearance, and adds, *inter alia*

"We are aware that R. Chananya did not leave any wife behing him. Yet it may be there is a woman waiting for him to marry or reject her, according to the law." <sup>15</sup>

What is the mystery of the man Chananya? Is he different from the other OLIM, and if so, how?

At the end of the first chapter, Agnon tells us that:

"Chananya made boxes for all the travellers  
but as for himself,  
he remained satisfied with his kerchief." <sup>16</sup>

This sentence moots stylistically, rythmically and textually a well known Talmudic saying:

"The whole world is sustained by virtue of my son Chanina,  
but for Chanina himself,  
he is satisfied by a bit of carrob from week to week." <sup>17</sup>

The Talmudic passage refers to the Tanah (mishnaic scholar)

R. Chanina son of Dosa, a personage known for the miracles which happened to him rather than for his Haladine sayings.

Obviously, the similarity between the names is not mere coincidence, and the phrase which Agnon uses does not resemble the Talmudic phrase by chance only. Both the Talmudic and the Agnonian phrases express similar ideas. In our story, we have a man whose talent enables others to have boxes, while he neither needs nor has one. In the Gemarrah, R. Chanina's virtue causes others to thrive, while he himself hardly subsists, and has only minimal needs.

It is important to notice Chananya's attitude towards the miracle which happened to him. To him it is natural and obvious, and he treats it almost nonchalantly. We hear not one word of excitement about it, neither from Chananya nor from Agnon:

"So he spread his kerchief and sat upon it. The kerchief promptly floated off to sea, carrying him upon it all the way to Eretz Yisrael." 18

Chananya describes the miracle:

"He said to them: I spread out my kerchief upon the sea and sat on it until I reached Eretz Yisrael." 19

Not an eyebrow is raised at the fact that a man crosses the sea on a kerchief! A similar attitude is present in the following tale about R. Chanina son of Dosa:

"One Friday at sunset R. Chanina son of Dosa saw that his daughter is sad. He said to her: My daughter, why do you grieve? She said to him: The oil bowl was exchanged by the vinegar bowl, and I lit the Sabbath light from it. He said: My daughter, why do you care? He who commanded the oil - and it burns, He will command the vinegar to burn - and it will burn. And it was said that it burnt on and on until they took a light for havdalla (Ritual at the termination of the Sabbath in which candlelight is used) from it." 20



This is the basis of a particular outlook on life - "He who commanded the oil - and it burns, he will command the vinegar - and it will burn." In the same way that to God, the chemical components of a substance do not matter, and it burns if He wants it to, so it is immaterial to Him whether he makes Chananya cross the sea on a ship - or on a kerchief. This is not the only resemblance between Chananya of our story and R. Chanina son of Dosa of the Talmud. There is a story about R. Chanina:

"He saw his townsfolk taking pledges and gifts up to Jerusalem. He said: everyone is taking gifts and pledges up to Jerusalem, and I do not take a thing. What did he do? He went out to the desert by his city, and saw a stone there, and he cut it and filed it and polished it. He said: I must take it up to Jerusalem. He wished to hire labourers and he chanced by five men. He said: Will you take this stone up to Jerusalem for me? They said: For fifty SELAIM we shall do it. He wanted to give it to them, but had it not. So they departed and went. Immediately, the Holy One, Blessed be His name, sent five angels disguised as human beings to him. He said to them: Will you take this stone up to Jerusalem for me? They said: If you give us five selaim we will take your stone up for you, provided you join with us. He joined with them and they found themselves standing in Jerusalem. He wanted to remunerate them but did not find them. He entered the seat of the Sanhedrin (religious supreme court) and asked about them, and they said to him: It seems that the ministering angels carried your stone up to Jerusalem." <sup>21</sup>

The motifs are very similar:

"Do you wish to take the stone up to Jerusalem? Join us and it will be done immediately". Thus in the Talmud. In Bilvav Yamim "Do you wish to go up to Eretz Yisrael? Spread your kerchief out on the water, and you will get there." This is no coincidence, but a well presented allegory.

Moreover, Chananya resembles another miracle maker in Jewish tradition - the Prophet Elijah, and here again the resemblance is too marked to be coincidental. Like Chananya, Elijah appears mysteriously, and his appearance is followed by a period of beneficial activity:

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of the Gilead, said unto Ahab ...." <sup>22</sup>

No introduction, no presentation of the prophet, no induction, just "and Elijah ... said ...", as though he is already well known. An introduction like this further enhances the mystery of the man - the Prophet - mystery which surrounded him in life through miracles which he performed, and which increased with his departure from earth in a chariot and horses of fire.

Chananya, too, appears out of an unknown, secretive past, and out curiosity as to his personality is further aroused by certain deeds he does:

"..... he took the lamp and all the other vessels of light for the house of study ... and rubbed them and polished them until they shone like new ... he made little hollow dishes for the lamps ... repaired torn books, setting them up in new boards and wrapping them up in fine skins..... Are you a coppersmith? they asked. No coppersmith am I .... but when I see a broken vessel, I feel sorry for it, then the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to me, do this or do that, and I do it."

Chananya knows crafts which he has never learnt. He may be dexterous and agile, but one of his accomplishments is no coincidence!

"The wagoner mounted one wagon and Chananya the other . . . . Chananya took the whip in his right hand and cracked it over the heads of the horses . . . . Those of the women who were accustomed to travel to markets and fairs said, never in our lives have we had such an easy journey as this. Are you a wagoner? the women then asked Chananya? No, he said, I'm not a wagoner, but horses are horses and know what is required of them, so they go.

Are you telling me, said the wagoner to Chananya, that you are not a wagoner? The very way you crack your whip shows that you are one.

Never did I drive a wagon and horses in my life, said Chananya except for the one time when I saw a Jew and his horses drowning in the river, and got them out and took him back to his home." <sup>24</sup>

This section contains several elements which indicate the identity of Chananya with Elijah the Prophet. The expertise in wagonry is reminiscent of the verse:

"an behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire . . . and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." <sup>25</sup>

Even a superficial acquaintance with the traditional folk stories about the Prophet Elijah is enough for recognizing that it is his hand which is easing the women's journey. Furthermore, which man could singlehandedly save a Jew and his horses who are drowning in the river, particularly when, by his own admission, he has never driven a wagon and horses before? This tale is typical of the tales told about the Prophet Elijah. Rescuing and saving at the last moment, when all hope has dwindled, is one of his main functions. Indeed, Chananya disappoints neither drowning Jew nor us. There is one more clear indicator of the identity of Chananya with Elijah:

".... As the dawn grew bright, the travellers saw the likeness of a man on the sea. They stared and saw that he had a full beard, earlocks on either cheek and a book in his hand; and a kerchief was spread out under him and on it he sat as a man who sits at ease. No great wave of the sea rose to drown him, nor did any sea beast swallow him .... So Israel stood on one side and the nations of the world on the other, fearful and staring, until their eyelashes became scorched by the sun. Then R. Shmuel Yosef, son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi, said: It is the Divine Presence, which returns with Israel to their place." <sup>26</sup>

Is there need for clearer proof? The author, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, tells us that R. Shmuel Yosef, son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi recognizes the man who is sitting so placidly as being "the Divine Presence", "returning with Israel to their place". Elijah's role in preceeding the coming of the Messiah is well known." <sup>27</sup>

Chananya is therefore no mere mortal. He represents the supreme, the pure, perhaps even the Holy. Even after arrival in Israel, the yardstick used to measure the other Olim will not do for Chananya:

"R. Yosef Meir also had to prepare to leave. He wished to dwell in Jerusalem but was not permitted to, on account of an ancient ordinance that no man may dwell in Jerusalem without a wife for more than a year. " <sup>28</sup>

Yet on the same page, we read:

"But Chananya lived many long years, strength and energy accruing to him year by year. When he was a hundred years old, he was like a lad of twenty in his fulfilment of the commandments .... and neither weakness nor weariness could be recognized in him."

Chananya lived in Jerusalem for long years, without anyone raising any objections. We are distinctly told that he became stronger every year, so we must not assume that he was allowed to dwell without a wife because he had lost his virility and was therefore in no danger of succumbing to his Yetzer Hara.<sup>29</sup>

Chananya is a partner to the Olim's journey, but he transcends them. Joining them in Buczacz, he parts from them and crosses the sea in a miraculous way already discribed. And his fellows watched "until their eyelashes became scorched" their eyes are with Chananya, but they will never reach him. He is the ideal - supreme, pure, wonderful. He is neither with the Olim nor in their midst. It is up to the Nilbavim to struggle daily in order to elevate themselves so as to reach his moral standard.

After we have dealt in our chapter with the identity of Chananya and with his personality, we have to return for a moment to the problematic traveller who was the main topic of our discussion in our previous chapter, the "one whose name we have forgotten."

Only in the light of the confrontation between the two, we will be able to evaluate properly the role and appreciate the complexity of the problems that this confrontation places at the doorstep of the nilbavim.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the fact that "he whose name we have forgotten" is one of the Olim, going with them wherever they go. Sometimes his presence is obvious, sometimes hidden, but he is always there, following them constantly. Even the wagoner notices their struggle with Yetzer Hara and he says:

"Here are these people, journeying to Eretz Yisrael and wanting to live on good terms with their Yetzer Hara. I should not wonder if they take it along with them to Eretz Yisrael." <sup>30</sup>

Indeed, their Yetzer Hara joined them, and came with them even to Eretz Yisrael.

It does not leave them, hindering them particularly at a location in which it succeeds in another of Agnon's stories Vehaya Heakov Lemishor, that is at the Leskowitz Fair.

"There it was that Satan came along and stood in their way .... Well then, what you must do is go to Leskowitz and earn money. Happy is the man who dwells in Eretz Yisrael and does not need to be supported by the Holy Cities. How people toil to reach Leskowitz! And now that you have come this far, will you go away without doing business?"

But the nilbavim overcome the temptation of Yetzer Hara:

"The whole world is going down and we are going up .... the whole world is going to the fair and we leave the fair and go to Eretz Yisrael " <sup>32</sup>  
(The Hebrew word for 'fair' has the same grammatical root as "going down").

The struggle is worthwhile the more one struggles, the more immune one becomes to one's Yetzer Hara. Only the constant struggle and conscious confrontation with their Yetzer Hara can save them from it. Witness what happened to Leibush the Butcher, who was nonchalant and unwilling to struggle with his Yetzer Hara. He fears not his Yetzer Hara, and offhandedly disregards the wagoners warning:

"Fear not for us, but rather quicken your horses so the Yetzer Hara does not catch you on the way". <sup>33</sup>

What was Leibush's end? The very land rejected him. In other words, Agnon here comes to teach us an important lesson: One's place of residence in no way whatsoever alters the fact that each person must constantly, perpetually and consistently struggle with his Yetzer Hara, that is - with himself.

R. Shmuel Yosef, son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi is one of the eight Olim who undertake the struggle and bear the burden. He speaks of

"a Jew want to go up to Eretz Yisrael, Satan immediately stands in his way and lets him not." 34

and so we are told by R. Shmuel Yosef son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi, concerning the fact that he who is not worthy to live in Eretz Yisrael is not permitted to do so:

"his tale concerns two old men who journeyed .... he who is worthy to go up to the land, said the ministering angels, him we accompany joyfully and precede with music and great joy. But he, said the angels of wrath, who is not sufficiently worthy to go up to the land and still goes up, him we drive away."

In this, R. Shmuel Yosef, son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi, and with him, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, the author, have expressed their opinions that going to Israel is not enough. It does not solve any problems, and the aliyah (going up) is of any value only if it makes for a spiritual ascent.

Agnon uses high drama to present to us the struggle within the man's soul - Chananya-Chanina -Elijah on the one hand, "he whose name we have forgotten"-Satan-Yetzer Hara- Gresler on the other, and the Olim-nilbavim- between the two extremes. The choice is theirs, and theirs only.

Whilst "he whose name we have forgotten" - Gresler travels in their ship and leaves them for not one moment, Chananya, the counterweight to their Yetzer Hara floats on the water, distant, visible but not accessible. They face their Yetzer Hara alone, without any outside aid. The struggle is all theirs. Should they succeed, success will be theirs alone, as would be failure.

Aliyah is elevating, but it has been said:

"whoever is greater than his friend, his Yetzer Hara is greater than his friends'." <sup>36</sup>

Hence, the geographical transfer to Eretz Yisrael does not only not annul the need for struggle with Yetzer Hara, but on the contrary, it increases it.



## REFERENCES AND NOTES TO "CHANANYA"

1. Many of Agnon's critics see the story in this light. See:
  - i B. Kurtzweil, Massot pp. 197, 225
  - ii S. Pnueli., Yetzirato shel Shai Agnon p. 135
  - iii Y. Se-Lavan, Shmeul Yosef Agnon p. 117
  - iv Efrayim Zoref, Shai Agnon, HaIsh ViYezirato p. 151
2. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 540
3. See: H. Zetlin HaEpikan Hagadol Shel Doreinu,  
Dr. HaHed, vol. X no. 4 p. 27 - who sees  
aliyah of Nilbavim in the same light.
4. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 534
5. E. Ben Yehuda, Milon vol. VII, p. 3682
6. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 540
7. ibid. p. 509
8. ibid. p. 529
9. ibid. p. 522
10. See: B. Kurtzweil, Massot, p. 196
11. See S. Verses, Sippur Ve Shorsho, p. 215
12. Agnon takes a stand in the question of whether or not to wait for the Messiah before going up to Israel. More on this issue - in the forthcoming chapters.
13. See above page 4 - 5
14. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 485
15. ibid. p. 527
16. ibid. p. 488
17. Taanit 24, 2 See also A.M. Lifshitz, Ketavim, p. 226  
and Dov Sadan, Al Shai Agnon pp. 157-159
18. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 540
19. ibid. p. 546
20. Taanit, 25, 1.

21. Shir HaShirim Raba 1, 3, Kohelet Rabatti 11
22. Kings I, 17.1
23. Elu Ve'Elu p. 487 - 488
24. ibid. p. 494
25. Kings II 2, 11
26. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 517
27. Malachi, 3, 23: "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."  
  
 Psikta Rabati, 1, 5: "when the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeems Israel, three days before the coming of the Messiah, Elijah comes and stands on the mountains of Israel and cries and mourns for them and says: Till when will you stand barren and deserted, and his voice is heard from one end of the world to the other."\*
28. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 498
29. The Talmud, in Pesachim 112, 2 tells of a confrontation between R. Chanina, son of Dosa, and Agrat daughter of Machlat, one of the devil queens. Not only is he not tempted by her, but he is so overpowering in his virtue that she begs him for mercy, which he grants by allowing her "freedom" two evenings each week.
30. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 498
31. See the failure of Menashe Chaim Hakohen in VeHaya HaEkov LeMishor, Elu Ve'Elu, p. 96 - 105
32. ibid. p. 496 - 499
33. ibid.
34. ibid. p. 521
35. ibid. p. 522 - 523
36. Sukka, 52, 1 See also Elu Ve'Elu, p. 422

CHAPTER THREE

THOSE GOOD OLD DAYS

## THE GOOD OLD DAYS

The previous chapter saw a discussion of Agnon's approach to the struggle of a Jew with himself. It became clear that a change of locality does not alter the basic need for struggle.

This chapter will see an examination of the need for struggle in a perspective of time - according to Agnon, are there, or were there, perhaps, times, when a Jew is or was exempt from struggling? Has Agnon ever described an ideal world, in which good reigns supreme, and all who live in it are good? Does he present a world that just living within it is so ennobling and elevating as to release from the struggle?

Agnon's many critics tend to divide his writings on the Galician Diaspora into three periods:

1. "Those Good Old Days"
2. Transition and the beginning of disintegration.
3. Disintegration and its results.

The "period-division" has become one of the major concepts underlying Agnon's research, and from reading of the critics it seems that most of them indeed accept it. <sup>1</sup>

This approach is seemingly justified, and the supporters of the "triple division" rely, to a certain extent, on Agnon himself. He often gives the feeling that such a division does indeed exist, for nostalgia for days gone by and generations long dead appears through all his writings. The longing for the past, for childhood, for grandfather's home and for the tranquility of Buczacz make Agnon's writing about that period seem like an idealization of it, a description of a heaven on earth. This approach can rely on a short story like "The Good Years",<sup>2</sup> which describes the deteriorating generations, or on the description of the passengers in "In Carriages of a Train"<sup>3</sup>.

R. Avraham Yizchak, R. Yitchak Yaakov, and R. Yaakov Yosef, are the three passengers. They are named after the patriarchs, and whoever is named after an earlier patriarch is more important.<sup>4</sup> Moreover:

"The generations become inferior, and now we have neither the devotion of the early Mitnagdim (opposers of chassidism) nor the humility of the early Chassidim."<sup>5</sup>

Other sayings, phrases, even stories, seem to point to a period in some distant past, in which everything was good and pure and innocent. Indeed, a superficial reading of those of Agnon's stories which describe the past, such as The Bridal Canopy, Hanidach, Vehaya Ha-Ekov LeMishor, In the Heart of the Seas, and others, gives us a feeling of unity of action and thought in the Jewish community.

Many of the critics see in "The Bridal Canopy" a prototype of a novel describing the complete world of the past, and see in it an idealization of "Those good old Days".<sup>6</sup> However, accepting Tochner's advice that:

"We do not seek, in any work, what should be in it, but what is in it,"<sup>7</sup>

we must approach the reading of "The Bridal Canopy" without any prejudice or preconceived ideas, in order that we find what the author has placed in it for us, and then we will discover that Agnon is far from idealizing that period.

At first, we must accept that "The Bridal Canopy" and all its subplots are one unit, the subplots being an integral part of the main plot, and not mere addenda.<sup>8</sup> From reading the critics it becomes clear that we must treat the entire work as one all encompassing unit of harmonious structure.

The skeleton of this structure is R. Yudel Chasid, and the events in which he, his wife and his three modest daughters are involved. Around this skeleton, completing the structure, is a wealth of subplots - tales within tales and tales following tales, tales of the naive and of the shrewd, of the miserly and of the generous, of the usual and of the unique. What unifies them is that they all contribute to the making of a complete picture.

On examination of the subplots of "The Bridal Canopy", the one which catches the eye is the story of R. Yisrael Shlomo the warden. It is extraordinarily long, taking up a full eighth of "The Bridal Canopy". This indicates that it is of major significance, and calls for a thorough examination of R. Yisrael Shlomo.

Regarding R. Yisrael Shlomo we have Agnon's testimony cum remark:

"R. Yisrael Shlomo, peace be upon him was full of good deeds." <sup>9</sup>

and

"R. Yisrael Shlomo .... who was a good leader to his town, and led Shbosh with wisdom." <sup>10</sup>

Should we accept Agnon's opinion about a character which he has created? Must we accept the author's "character reference", or should we judge only in terms of a characters thoughts, actions and functions?

We would do well to abide by Leah Goldbergs advice cum warning:

"We, the readers of Agnon, are well acquainted with the subtle charms of his writing, and we know well that when he happens to apparently say very definite things, we should respect him - but suspect him." <sup>11</sup>

And David Tamar writes on this matter:

"In this matter, pay no heed to the poet, for poetry has seventy faces."<sup>12</sup>

The poet is no more qualified to testify about the character of any of the protagonists in his story than any of his readers, and if there seems to be a contradiction between the author's statement and the truth, as apparent from the text, we must reject the author's statement.

In the case of R. Yisrael Shlomo, there is a tremendous gap between the authors statement and the conclusions reached from a thorough examination of his personality, on the basis of his actions. There is hardly a wrong of which a public leader may be guilty, which Agnon does not attribute to R. Yisrael Shlomo.<sup>13</sup>

After following R. Yisrael Shlomo's monstrous actions, describing his malevolent intentions and telling of the Satanic plans he has for revenging an enemy who has done him no harm, did Agnon really want us to treat him apologetically and to assume, with the author, that he was "full of good deeds ... and a good leader to his town"? It is not logical, nor is it the truth.

To see R. Yisrael Shlomo in all his naked ugliness, and so that we judge correctly the importance of R. Yisrael Shlomo's character within the context of "The Bridal Canopy" and even above that, we must follow his misdeeds step by step, as Agnon describes them and as he wanted us to see them. Only after setting up a detailed list of R. Yisrael Shlomo's evil deeds, will we be able to say whether or not he was "full of good deeds", as Agnon's seemingly innocent statement would lead us to believe.

Now follows a list of R. Yisrael Shlomo's wrongdoings:

1. He used his public status "to have bound and gagged" one who was cheeky to him. There being no evidence that the cheeky one spoke up against R. Yisrael Shlomo in his public capacity, but rather - he spoke against him personally, he had no right to use his public status to punish him. <sup>14</sup>
2. He exploited the Beadle, who is a public servant, for his private needs, by ordering him to guard the gagged man. <sup>15</sup>
3. He enticed an innocent man to mislead the public, <sup>16</sup> by advising him to sit by an open Gemarah and pretend he is learning. <sup>17</sup>
4. Enticing the innocent young man to mislead the public was a transgression of "Thou shalt not put a stumbling block before the blind." <sup>18</sup>
5. R. Yisrael Shlomo wilfully mislead the congregation, people who trusted him, - he lied to them when they asked him about the young man, and so used the Torah as a means for his own end and for misleading his flock. <sup>19</sup>
6. He betrayed the trust placed in him when the banned writings of the Shabtaim (followers of a false messiah) were given to him for safe keeping, and he used these writings for deliberately spreading a lie. <sup>20</sup>
7. When wanting the congregation to think highly of the young man, he reverted to referring to the murder of half a million innocent Jews in the Chmelnitzky pogroms. In other words, he used innocently spilt blood to further his lowly intentions, saying "he was fleeing from the wrath of the oppressor" while knowing full well the young man's background, and being aware that he was fleeing from the son of the Yeshiva's janitor. <sup>21</sup>
8. He became one of the "mockers" on whom it was said that they "do not come before the Divine Presence" <sup>22</sup> He mocked the young man while he was a guest in his own house, eating his bread. Not only did he not respect him, as he should have done ("Hospitality is greater than accommodating the Divine Presence" <sup>23</sup>), but he mocked and shamed him. <sup>24</sup>



9. He insulted the people of Shbosh by reminding them of "their shame and that of their fathers", and all this when they wanted to make a match for the young man under his patronage. <sup>25</sup>
10. R. Yisrael Shlomo's behaviour towards Shimon Nathan was hypocritical. Seeming to befriend him, he waited silently for his downfall. He made a match for Shimon Nathan with a boy whom he knew to be an ignoramus, while Shimon Nathan thought him to be learned. <sup>26</sup>
11. He dealt despotically with his coachman and raised his hand (pipe) to smite him, thus classing himself with the villains. <sup>27</sup> The description of this occurrence leaves no doubt that this was no isolated case. On the contrary - he usually hit the coachman with a stick. <sup>28</sup>
12. He disturbed the public order for his own convenience and selfish needs, allowing for the wagons to be directed to other streets while he had his afternoon sleep. <sup>29</sup>
13. He planned to reap the benefits of the downfall of a friend, wanting to disgrace Shimon Nathan, and waiting for his ruin. <sup>30</sup>
14. R. Yisrael Shlomo intended to disgrace the groom publically, by urging him to "open your mouth and let your words be as a light", <sup>31</sup> while being sure that he knows no Torah. Our sages have said: "Whoever goes down to hell, goes up, all but three, that go down and do not go up ... and he who shames his friends in public" <sup>32</sup> and "He who shames his friend in public has no part in the world to come." <sup>33</sup>
15. He used his public position to harm R. Abele, who had in no way harmed him, so he burdened him with "extra taxes which were not legal, and sent the tax collector before his time". Furthermore, he cursed him. <sup>34</sup>

16. He mixed with worthless men, like Pinye Choli Ra (bad disease - curse) with the sole intention of harming others. <sup>35</sup>
17. He sent Pinye to Brod in order to mislead and lie to R. Abele's in-law. <sup>36</sup>
18. He knowingly, wilfully and maliciously lied to R. Abele's in-law, <sup>37</sup> and in so doing he caused sorrow to two families, and tragedy and shame to two innocent young people, who were forced to divorce the day after their marriage. <sup>38</sup>
19. R. Yisrael Shlomo caused his wife to aid him in bringing about the aforementioned tragedy. <sup>39</sup>
20. He impinged on the sanctity of the Sabbath and its honouring, because of the loss of the cat Lasonka, and he lessened his Torah study for the same reason. <sup>40</sup>
21. He did not fulfil his public duties, for after Lasonka's loss, he ignored private needs, as well as public needs, as when the town was in danger of a pogrom. <sup>41</sup>

This long list of unrespectful deeds speaks like a hundred witnesses about R. Yisrael Shlomo, and there is no need to add to what Agnon has described with such piercing vision. The maker of the man, he created him as he described him, and as he wanted the reader to see and understand him. The author is the creator, the prosecutor and the judge, seeing and understanding all. Nothing can add to such a description of dishonesty, sycophanthry and complete unwholesomeness.

However, to complete the picture, it is necessary to note some phrases which Agnon uses in describing R. Yisrael Shlomo.

".... the cat.... the master of the house put out his hand and stroked her tigerlike fur, which is not the habit of a Jewish householder." <sup>42</sup>

".... On his return from the road, R. Yisrael Shlomo said (of the cat): I wonder if these cruel ones have not forgotten you, and he asked: Did you feed her on time? And did you remember the young man?" <sup>43</sup>

Cat before young man are his priorities.

"Do you have any more words of praise for Lasanka? <sup>44</sup>

There is something sacreligious in using this phrase, first used in reference to the Almighty, <sup>45</sup> when referring to a cat.

"R. Yisrael Shlomo .... liked the young man, for Shimon Nathan's downfall will come about through him." <sup>46</sup>

Then the unequivocally sharp phrase:

"R. Yisrael Shlomo tried to deceive Divine Reason" <sup>47</sup>, is taken from the words of the Midrash: "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.... from where went he out? .... he ignored the words of the Lord, Blessed be He, and emerged deceiving Divine Reason .... defrauding his Maker." <sup>48</sup>

This phrase alone is enough to tell of Agnon's negative attitude to R. Yisrael Shlomo. <sup>49</sup>

"Then what seeks His Highness in my town" <sup>50</sup> - modestly! And a description of cruel cynicism:

"R. Yisrael Shlomo sat down amazed, for a while, wondering about himself that earlier he sorrowed for Abele, and now he cares neither for Abeles grief nor for Abele's in-laws grief." <sup>51</sup>

He regretted having at all sorrowed with R. Abele. "Regretting a good deed done in the past" is viewed gravely by our sages, to the extent of ones losing all merit accumulated in ones lifetime. <sup>52</sup>

"Any meals of which Lasonka has not tasted does not taste like food." <sup>53</sup> This calls for a comparison. R. Ephraim Hosts wife says: "from the day my husband knew his own mind, he does not eat unless there is a guest with him". <sup>54</sup> A comparison should be made between R. Yisrael Shlomo's meal and that of Yehoshua Eliezer. <sup>55</sup>

Moreover, in Jewish tradition eating with a cat has negative connotations.<sup>56</sup> We can evaluate R. Yisrael Shlomo from the comparison to the Jewish tax collector who was given the squire's dog, so he could teach him to pray from a Siddur.<sup>57</sup>

	<u>The Comparison</u>	<u>Our Case</u>
1.	The Jewish tax collector.	Tzirel Treiney.
2.	The Dog.	Lasonka.
3.	The despotic squire.	R. Yisrael Shlomo.

This comparison is no compliment to R. Yisrael Shlomo. Nor is the villagers' simple theory flattering:

"Who knows what this vanished Lasonka was ere she was a cat? .... Probably she was R. Yisrael Shlomo's beadle in an earlier incarnation, and R. Yisrael Shlomo didn't treat him properly, just as he oppresses all his servants, so he oppressed the self same beadle... It was decreed on high he must return to this world ...<sup>58</sup> and therefore he descended and was incarnated in a cat; and now that R. Yisrael Shlomo has righted in Lasonka what he has wronged towards the beadle, the soul has been righted and the days of the incarnation are at an end."<sup>59</sup>

The description of the extremes to which the villager goes in order to be received by the warden is shocking and humiliating.

"A Bishop came to town and many gentiles came from all the surrounding villages to welcome him, and naturally they won't come empty handed, so I'll go towards them, perhaps I'll chance to buy a fowl and I will bring it to Esther Malka. Esther Malka sees the fowl, that it is fat and good, and she says - this fowl for Sabbath. On Friday night at the meal, R. Yisrael Shlomo says to Esther Malka .... whence came you by such a good fowl? Esther Malka smiles and says: whence? I puckered my lips and whistled toot toot toot, and promptly this fat fowl flew into my hand. Says R. Yisrael Shlomo, I have no doubt that that is indeed how it happened, but we must still know from which place it came. Says Esther Malka: do you remember

that Jew whom the squire wants to throw out of his place of livelihood? Imagine, he himself brought me the fowl. Said R. Yisrael Shlomo, long may he live, I didn't know he is so capable.

Then R. Yisrael Shlomo thinks of me and mentions me to the squire. The squire sends for me, and says you may remain in the place of your livelihood." <sup>60</sup>

This is certainly no description of an ideal warden. The fact that the villager has to revert to tactics which are almost bribery in order to be remembered by R. Yisrael Shlomo throw an added negative light on the already besmirched warden, and prove that he was a warden who "is arrogant with his community" <sup>61</sup> and "there are four which cannot be tolerated (by the mind) ... and a warden who is arrogant with his community". <sup>62</sup>

Behind the light description of the villagers thoughts and the "tricks" to which he reverts, lurks almost criminal negligence by R. Yisrael Shlomo of his role as warden and as member of "The Council of Four Lands". In that capacity, <sup>63</sup> it was up to him to prevent the occurrence of "came another and added to the rent of the inn, so the squire intended to sent him (the villager) from his livelihood." <sup>64</sup>

And when the pathetic villager found that he was in trouble and "he came to town to beg of R. Yisrael Shlomo to speak of him to the squire", he found R. Yisrael Shlomo busy with Lasonka, and too occupied to deal with him.

Before closing this topic, let us see some comments Agnon himself makes about R. Yisrael Shlomo, comments which speak for themselves:

"His intention was to harm." <sup>65</sup>

"His bad thought became a good one." <sup>66</sup>

Said R. Zecharya . . . ." is that all we have against R. Yisrael Shlomo? But it is better to be silent, for one only mentions the dead in praise." <sup>67</sup>

R. Zecharya . . . said, "I shouldn't tell, but for two reasons I will tell - it is a virtue to speak the truth, and I flatter no one, not even a man like R. Yisrael Shlomo." <sup>68</sup>

From all the above, it is clear that Agnon intended and succeeded to show R. Yisrael Shlomo the Warden as a corrupt and negative figure. <sup>69</sup> Having removed his guise of innocence, R. Yisrael Shlomo stands before us in all his monstrous ugliness, and it is this man who plays a central role in the subplots of "The Bridal Canopy". Any future discussion of "The Bridal Canopy" must take into account this presentation of the warden, and the shadow it casts on its surroundings.

Agnon uses an interesting tactic to emphasize the impression which R. Yisrael Shlomo's character makes when viewed in the light of the background of the story and of his period, as well as the impression he makes on both his contemporaries and on the readers.

We encounter Yisrael Shlomo, the matchmaker, who is named after R. Yisrael Shlomo the warden, in Ephraim Hosts home, in Zboriv. <sup>70</sup> Although we have no detailed map of R. Yudel Chassid's wanderings in Galicia, we may assume that Shbosh and Zboriv are not far from each other. <sup>71</sup> When R. Ephraim finds that his guest is a landsman of R. Yisrael Shlomo, he asks "tell me how R. Yisrael Shlomo is keeping", and only then do all those present learn of his death, and that he has been dead long years: "and if we say he died in the year that I was born, we find that from his death till this day have passed thirty two years." <sup>71a</sup>

Is it possible that a warden of the calibre of R. Yisrael Shlomo died, and the surrounding villages do not know of it? Had they not heard of it immediately, then surely soon after? The gap of thirty two years is strange and unacceptable.

I feel that in this, Agnon reveals his true attitude to the "Good old Days" theory: not only was R. Yudel Chassid's generation far from perfection, but even in the generation before it, removed a full thirty two years from it, not everything was in order - then too, were corruption and evil.<sup>72</sup>

The time has now come to investigate the importance of R. Yisrael Shlomo, whom the author has taken so much trouble to describe, date and place so carefully. What has emerged so far is that though "The Bridal Canopy" deals with the past, it contains shadows and darkness, and these dark and shady spots are of major importance in our understanding of Agnon, for the shades enable us to see the light spots and evaluate them properly.

The dominant characteristic in R. Yisrael Shlomo is his cynicism and wickedness. He has no guilt feelings, and no conscience. We have already pointed out<sup>73</sup> how on the one occasion that he seems to show regret for the damage he caused to R. Abele, his family and his in-laws, he "recovers" quickly and all his doubts and regrets disappear.

He does not overcome his Yetzer Hara, because he does not struggle with it - he makes not the slightest attempt at bettering his ways and directing his actions in a manner befitting a public personage. With his behaviour, he fulfils the function intended for him by Agnon, namely, serving as a shadow which is contrasted with the light

emanating from R. Yudil's personality.

R. Yudil Chassid is a real figure, convulsing in his struggle against Yetzer Hara. It would be unfeasable to prove this by quoting the text, as large parts of The Bridal Canopy are devoted entirely to his struggle.

Let us, however, examine one scene, in which, from under a light description, emerges the strength of R. Yudil Chassid in his ability to withstand those who try to lead him off the righteous path, even if these agents of temptation "can even get the fish of the Denister to come ashore with their promises." <sup>74</sup>

After trying to convince him to join them in their business dealings, and failing, <sup>75</sup> they offer him "a house with a veranda facing the synagogue .... must just go to the door step to hear the cantor .... respond "Yehe Shme Raba" .... participating in Kedusha (prayer said only in a minyan) directly from the bed ...." But R. Yudil Chassid can differentiate between real and seeming values, <sup>76</sup> and answers: "as for your words regarding a house being important, is not the house of which the sages spoke, far more so?" <sup>77</sup>

R. Yudil resists the agents with every strength and power of his soul, power and strength deriving from faith and study of the Torah. His victory over them is complete: "And they departed with faces melancholy and knees that knock, while R. Yudil himself betook to the holy labour." <sup>78</sup>

In this particular section, R. Yudil is tempted by flesh and blood. But he is tempted and bothered, in different forms throughout his journey. He is aware of it and does not try to ignore the problem or avoid confrontation with it, and in this lies his spiritual greatness. The constant struggle is an integral part of his being. It motivates him and gives meaning to his life - he always weighs and decides each of his actions or lack of them in terms of their effect and value for his struggle with his Yetzer Hara:



"How well did R. Yudil know that when a man wants a good thing, he is immediately tempted from all sides and is not permitted to do it. Therefore one must then be stubborn, so that, mercy upon us, the Yetzer Hara, who wants to weaken the strength of Holiness, should not win." 79

Remarks such as the above are present throughout The Bridal Canopy.

R. Yudil Chassid's struggle is impressive in its own right. It becomes far more impressive when viewed in the light of the deeds and misdeeds of R. Yisrael Shlomo, the warden. The comparison between the two men and that which they represent and the interplay of light and dark go to create the dramatic tension in The Bridal Canopy.

This tension will increase if we focus on another wonderful personage in the novel - the Rabbi of Apta. We have already pointed out that R. Yisrael Shlomo's personality must be seen in terms of the light radiating from R. Yudil Chassid. However, the real antithesis to R. Yisrael Shlomo is the Rabbi of Apta - the two men are the two edges of the axis around which the story revolves. The one does not struggle against his Yetzer Hara, while the other has no need to do so. The Rabbi of Apta is over and above the problems which trouble the ordinary Jew, such as R. Yudil Chassid. To us, the Rabbi of Apta appears as one who has completely overcome his Yetzer Hara.

Between the two extremes of the axis stands R. Yudel Chassid, who represents, therefore, the Jewish public.<sup>80</sup> Troubled with unwed daughters, the man who is so eager to learn yet is hungry, represents the people of his time and place. In time of trouble, he turns to his Rabbi, and the Rabbi's advice directs him in his voyage to marry his daughters, showing him the way and guiding him.

The picture taking form is startlingly similar to that of "In the Heart of the Seas":

In the Heart of the Seas

Chananya

The Nilbavim - Olim

"He whose name we  
have forgotten"

The Bridal Canopy

The Rabbi of Apta

R. Yudel Chassid

R. Yisrael Shlomo

Chananya and the Rabbi of Apta both stand above society and above the simple man's problems, and any scale which is applied to them cannot be applied to ordinary people, in the same way that laws of thinking and doing which are generally accepted are not valid for them. The sphere to which they belong is elevated and purified, a sphere far above the practical.

The Nilbavim - Olim, like R. Yudel Chassid, are forced to conduct a perpetual struggle with themselves, their negative tendencies, their human weaknesses, or in other words - with their Yetzer Hara.<sup>81</sup>

This struggle is described in both stories - the change of time or place do not alter the inevitability of it. The ascent to Eretz Yisrael does not lessen the struggle, nor is a member of the supposedly perfect world of "those good old days" absolved from it. As was said at the beginning of this chapter - Agnon does not intend, in "The Bridal Canopy", to describe a sterile world of stereotyped "good". 82

The description is of man at war, and he who has the courage to struggle is rewarded and elevated, whilst he who does not have the courage is condemned. Witness Agnon's attitude to R. Yisrael Shlomo, and even to his memory, as follows:

"Everyone" is invited to Pesile's wedding. Agnon makes everyone rejoice. All but a selected few:

".... except the miser whose plate had broken and whose pockets had torn so he could not hold the driblets of oil and the grains of rice from the shops of his debtors; and so he had died of starvation.

.... the Rabbi who used to fast from Sabbath to Sabbath but who used to consume more on the Sabbath than any ordinary man during the whole of the week.... had also departed from this life, being summoned to the upper assembly because the angels were jealous of his fastings and men of his feastings ...."83

A distinct effort is made here by Agnon to purify the atmosphere in anticipation of the highlight of the novel and towards its conclusion - Pesile's marriage.

Agnon saw to it that those who do not please him will not be present at the celebration. One of those absent is

Yisrael Shlomo. He is a matchmaker,<sup>84</sup> and it was their custom to attend weddings. So for what reason did Agnon not invite him to the wedding, particularly after he had told tales with R. Yudil Chassid many a night in R. Ephraim Hosts's home?

Agnon is choosy about with whom he sits down to eat,<sup>85</sup> and is not prepared to sit down at a table with a namesake of R. Yisrael Shlomo the warden. At this particular marriage feast, Agnon was personally present, in the guise of the wise man from Jerusalem.<sup>86</sup>

Yisrael Shlomo's absence from the marriage celebration is deliberate and no mere oversight, as is obvious from the fact that Agnon mentions him during the most central scene of "The Bridal Canopy".

"the bride and the groom were standing under the Canopy, and the joy was great and growing. What should we tell and what should we not tell, if we tell how they ate and drank and danced ... we have heard of such things in the marriage of that young man about whom Yisrael Shlomo told us." <sup>87</sup>

Mentions him but does not invite him,<sup>88</sup> happy to rejoice with all but with R. Yisrael Shlomo's namesake.<sup>89</sup>

On the other hand stands the Rabbi of Apta. By his very personality he seems to be directing the lives of R. Yudil Chassid and his family. In R. Yudil's struggle, and in his many problems, he gains support from the Rabbi. It is worth following the Rabbi of Apta's presence in all major turning points throughout the book.<sup>90</sup>

Frumit turns to the Rabbi at the very beginning:

"What did Frumit do? She went to the saintly Rabbi of Apta . . . . and she cried out to him . . . Rabbi, aid me". 91

The advice he gives her is practical, carrying R. Yudil along his way and escorting him throughout his adventures. In fact, when R. Yudil ignores, apparently out of forgetfulness the Rabbi's advice, he is told:

"If I didn't know you I would say that you have no faith in the sages; didn't the Rabbi of Apta tell you that as much as the father of the bridegroom should undertake to provide for his son, so much you should undertake to provide for your daughter? Hence there must be a father to the bridegroom and there must be a dowry, but here there is neither a father to the bridegroom nor any dowry, so how can this be the heaven-made match of which the Rabbi of Apta knows?" 92

The words of the Rabbi are commented upon in the same way as the words of the Torah or the Mishna and Talmud are commented upon in the courses of study. These words are enough for R. Yudil to sever the connection and join with Yoel, his bosom friend".

The Rabbi of Apta plays an even more important role in another turning point in R. Yudil's travels.

After having depressing thoughts about not dedicating himself to Torah and wasting his time, R. Yudil decides that he must return home, "so he told Neta to turn the horses around so they would go back to his home".

"But it was not yet time for R. Yudil to return, for the bidding of the Rabbi of Apta has to be fulfilled in its entirety. Come, consider how mighty are the words of the saints: he ordered R. Yudil to travel until he found a worthy match, and when he desired to rid himself of his errand and return home, Neta turned the heads of the horses about; yet within a little while he recognized that they were not returning to Zboriv but were still on the road to Pommoren, that is, to the place to which they had first intended to travel. How astonished Neta was. here they had started out from Zboriv bound for Pommoren, and he had turned his horses about, so it stood to reason that they ought to be on their way back to Zboriv, and yet the end of it was that they were near Pommoren. Neta, Neta, said Neta to himself, day after day I'm a-telling you not to drink no brandy along the road .... but how am I to account for it that after turning my horses' heads towards Zboriv, I now find myself near Pommoren?

Come, consider then, R. Yudil comforted him, that all directions in which a man may turn are to his advantage and benefit. You turned the horses about so that we should return to Brod, and now the horses heads have been turned about we find ourselves near Pommoren. And why So that we should not free ourselves of the orders of the saintly Rabbi of Apta." <sup>93</sup>

The Rabbi's words are not to be doubted, and are to be carried out unquestioningly. When R. Yudil makes a match with R. Vavi "R. Vavi undertook twelve thousand gold pieces and R. Yudil undertook twelve thousand gold pieces" <sup>94</sup> No hesitation whatsoever.

It seems like downright dishonesty. R. Yudil knows well, to quote his wife, that he does not even have twelve pennies, so how does he dare undertake twelve thousand gold pieces for his daughter's dowry?

But the Rabbi had ordered him to undertake as much as would the groom's father, so he undertakes a sum so large without any doubt or feelings of guilt. The twelve thousand gold pieces can be considered as safe and secure as if they were already in his pocket.

This security is so entrenched that when R. Vavi, his in-law, justifiably cries out "woe unto you, you beggar, that you have not even a garment for yourself and you promise twelve thousand gold pieces for your daughter".<sup>95</sup> R. Yudil calmly answers "I have faith in the Holy One, Blessed be He, that he will fulfill my promise." Note, not "His promise", not "the Rabbi of Apta's promise", but "my promise". R. Yudil identifies with his Rabbi, and is certain of the Rabbi's identity with the Holy One, Blessed be He, so there is complete faith that the promise will be kept - "a righteous man decides and the Holy One, Blessed be He, executes".<sup>96</sup>

This faith is expressed in the words of the Rabbi of Apta:

"Yudil's wife, do not sorrow, there is no difference between twelve pennies and twelve thousand gold pieces. He who gives one, gives the other."<sup>97</sup>

Compare this to the words of R. Chanina ben Dosa, discussed in the previous chapter: he said to her "my daughter, why do you care? He who commanded the oil and it burns, he will command the vinegar and it will burn."<sup>98</sup>

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa

He said to her,  
my daughter, why do you  
care?  
He who commanded the oil-  
and it burns  
He will command the  
vinegar - and it will burn.

The Rabbi of Apta

He said to her,  
Yudil's wife, do not sorrow  
He who gives one  
Gives the other.<sup>99</sup>

The similarity is not merely structural and stylistic - in both cases, a complete faith is dominant - a belief that the Almighty controls the world as He desires, and according to the needs of those who fear Him. If there is ever a need to change the natural order, in order to satisfy those needs - that, too, is done, and that which seems supernatural to us is natural to Him who commanded the oil - and it burns.

When R. Vavi the in-law comes to visit, Frumit again goes to the Rabbi, and with the same simplicity and charm with which he calmed her earlier, he now gives her the most simple advice possible:

"You have a fowl? Go out and prepare a meal for the in-law." 100

The results are well known - in this, as in everything else, the Rabbi from Apta's advice to R. Yudil and his family was correct and beneficial.

To summarize this chapter: In "The Bridal Canopy", Agnon describes an eternal human problem - man's struggle with himself. This chapter has shown that this problem existed even in the period which seems pure and perfect, namely "Those Good Old Days".



## REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "THOSE GOOD OLD DAYS"

1. "From a thorough examination of Agnon's stories it may be concluded that there are large variations in the description of Jewish community life, and everything depends on distances in time.

The reality of the present and of the immediate past is described critically, ironically, and the community is sometimes an object for what is almost Haskalah (Enlightenment) style satire. On the other hand, Agnon leaves an ideal picture of the Jewish community, religious institutions, great Rabbi's and Zadikim of the distant past". (B. Kurtzweil, Masot p. 335)

For other expressions of this optimum see:

- i) ibid. p. 24
  - ii) Y. Friedlander, Haklal VeHapsat Besipurei Agnon, in Yuval Shai p. 61
  - iii) Hochman, The Fiction of Agnon p.77
  - iv) G. Moked, Rivdei Mashmaut Shonim Batechnika Shel "Hanidach", in Moznayim, Av-Elul 5728, p. 208
2. Elu Ve'Elu, p. 463 - 474
  3. Ha'Esh Ve HaEtzim p. 141-238
  4. Their names state their importance Indeed, Agnon gives most prominence to R. Avraham Yitzchak, less to R. Yizchak Yaakov and least to R. Yaakov Yosef. This is self evident from their physical descriptions and from the description of their handshakes (p. 141)
  5. Elu Ve'Elu p. 158
  6. i Kurtzweil, B. Masot, p. 23, 24, 51, and see p. 66 for his reference to Dov Sadan
  - ii Shamir, M. Yuval Shai p. 83-84
  - iii Tochner, M. Pesher Agnon p. 29
  7. Tochner, M. ibid p. 33 see also  
Goldberg, L. in LeAgnon Shai p. 48  
Golan, A. in Moznayim, Shvat, 5731 p. 216

8. "By organizing the vast story material into one structure of pre-intended meaning, "The Bridal Canopy" was saved from the sparadicism of the traditional God fearing folk tales .... The cancellation of the barrier between the frame (Tales of R. Yudil) and the many other stories included in it, might have increased the confusion. But the unique structure, into which Agnon wound his subject matter, gains control over it and bestows upon the God fearing tales of "The Bridal Canopy" an organic unity of an artistic masterpiece". (M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p.34)

""The Bridal Canopy" comes to us as an organic creation, in which a weaver - the different elements which compose it are united and become as one body." (S. Werses, Lamivneh Shel Hachnasat Kalah, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 125

"The stories are therefore not addenda to the work - there is a mutual relationship between them and the central story. (ibid p. 144)

G. Shaked also deals with this. After referring to Werses' paper he adds "In "The Bridal Canopy" a very real external unity is maintained, although the overall unity is gained by the connotations and combinations by the reader, who joins the frame to its deviations and conceives of the overall meaning of the work after a process of separation, abstraction an recomposition of the motifs ..... To understand the structure, its shape and its relationship to meaning, it is enough to examine the motifs and their connections." (Achdue Veribuy, in Moznayim, Nissan Iyar 5726, p. 463)

9. "The Bridal Canopy" . 124
10. ibid. p. 169
11. L. Goldberg, 'Hasofer Vegiboro' in LeAgnon Shai p. 48
12. D. Tamar, Levush Ve Toch, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 335  
See also B. Kurtzweil, Masot, p. 120-121, about the reliability of the author's statement on Rechnitz character in Shvuat Emunim.
13. The critics do not give R. Yisrael Shlomo the attention due to him, and treat him apologetically, if at all. See:
- i) A.M. Lifshitz, Ketavim, p. 214
  - ii) M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 39, 43
  - iii) S. Werses, Sipur VeShorsho p. 180-181

14. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 126
15. ibid.
16. See S. Werses, Sipur Ve Shorsho, p. 180
17. ibid. p. 130
18. Leviticus 19, 14
19. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 134
20. ibid.
21. ibid. p. 128
22. Sota 42, 1
23. Shabbat, 127,1 Shukot, 35,1
24. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 137
25. ibid. p. 138
26. ibid. p. 140
27. According to Rashi to Exodus, 2, 13, anyone who raises his hand to smite his fellow is called "villain".
28. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 142
29. ibid. p. 143
30. ibid. p. 146 - 147
31. ibid. p. 147
32. Baba Metzia 58,2
33. ibid. 59,1 see also Ethics of the Fathers, 3, 15
34. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 155
35. ibid. p. 158
36. ibid. p. 160 - 162
37. ibid. p. 166 - 167

38. S. Werses, in Sipur Ve Shorsho, p. 181, sees R. Yisrael Shlomo's shameful sole in the annullment of the marriage as "a misunderstanding".
39. A.M. Lipshitz (Ketavim p. 214) sees Esther Malka as "a good woman doing her husbands will".
40. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 187
41. ibid. p. 180
42. ibid. p. 129
43. ibid. p. 143
44. ibid.
45. Brachot 33, 1
46. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 143
47. ibid. p. 147
48. Bereshit Rabba, 22, 28
49. See: M.Y. Herczl Shai Olamot, M'korot, L'Agnon p. 11
50. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 167
51. ibid.
52. "R. Shimon son of Yochai said: Even one who was a complete Zadik all his life, if he rebelled towards the end of his days, he is not merited with his earthly mitzvot. The gemarrah asks: surely he should be accredited for his early good deeds? Answers Reish Lakish: For regretting his early good deeds, it is as though he had never done them." (Kiddushin, 40, 2).
53. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 175
54. ibid. p. 114
55. ibid. p. 84
56. Horayot, 13, 1 .... The disciples asked: How is it that a dog knows its master, and a cat knows not its master? He said to them: Eating from that which a mouse eats causes forgetfulness, how much more so does eating a mouse.

57. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 176
58. CF. Tmol Shilshom p. 487
59. *ibid.*
60. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 182
61. Chagiga, 5, 1
62. Pesachim 113, 2
63. The "Council of Four Lands" fixed the Oranda Ordinance, which prevented competition between Jews in the leasing of plots (or means of livelihood in them) from the Polish noblemen. (Toldot Am Yisrael, ed. Ch. H. Ben Sasson, vol. II p. 280). See also The Tale of R. Yosef, Elu Ve'Elu, p. 426.
64. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 176
65. *ibid.* p. 151
66. *ibid.* This expression is commonly used in referring to Balaam.
67. *ibid.* p. 152
68. *ibid.* Agnon's great work on Buczacz (Ir Umeloa) appeared recently, and in it is the story of Yakili, in two versions (p. 501-507, 508-517). Both versions tell of a young Jewish man of good family, who was executed by the authorities, though not guilty. Agnon does not hide R. Yisrael Shlomo's past in shedding the young man's innocent blood, and concludes "...passed some time, and the hangman wound the rope round Yakili's neck .... his soul left him .... at that time all the Jews of the town, with the Av Beth Din (head of religious court) were praying and supplicating in great fears. Suddenly the Av Beth Din stretched his hands towards the town, and with him all the God fearing, and they said "our hands have not spilt this blood, and our eyes have not seen." Where was R. Yisrael Shlomo? I do not know. It appears that he was not among those who watched Yakili's death and was not among those who said "Our hands have not spilt his blood", (p. 507)
69. M. Tochner (Pesher Agnon p. 38) feels that this story is inconsistent with his concept of the atmosphere of "The Bridal Canopy" but he does not explain this inconsistency.

70. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 124
71. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 26 - "Brazen is eight hours from Brod", and we know that Brazen is six villages away from Zboriv, while Shbosh is close to Brod.
- 71a. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 124 writes: "Agnon was precise ... when he sent R. Yudel Chassid on his journey, he did not invent the names of towns and villages ... but studied an Eastern Galician map and determined a march route from Brody - West". Brawer (Moznayim, Ada 12, 5733, p. 186).
72. On the "time" factor in Agnon see:
  1. Kurtzweil, Masot, p. 24
  2. M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 44
73. See above p. 45
74. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 225
75. Compare R. Yudel Chassid's refusal to join them with Menashe Chaim's eagerness to do business at the Leshkovitz Fair.  
Elu Ve'Elu p. 97
76. "Trials vary. Sometimes the Yetzer Hara tries one using holiness, such as praying in public and so on, and this is to prevent him from fulfilling the commandment to which he is then paying attention." "The Bridal Canopy" p. 312.
77. R. Yudel is referring to the Talmudic discussions about buying a house. The Talmudic discussion is to him more important than the possession of a house.
78. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 228
79. ibid. p. 220
80. See M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon, p. 47
81. See S.Y. Pnueli, Yetzirato Shel Shai Agnon, p. 134, for the differences between Chananya and R. Yudel Chassid.

82. See: Y.M. Gutman Hachen, Min Hasifrut Hachadasha p. 14
83. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 403-404
84. ibid. p. 172, 293
85. "The pure minded in Jerusalem used to not go in for a meal until they knew who would sit with them" - Sanhedrin 23, 1. See also Eicha Rabbati 4, 4, Tana DeBei Eiyahu Rabba, 29. Agnon quoted this Talmudic saying at the royal banquet given in his honour in Stockholm, after he received the Nobel Prize.
86. See M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 50-61
87. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 410
88. Tochner (Pesher Agnon, p. 48) writes that the wedding emphasizes the completeness of Jewish life. "All wrongdoings have been righted, the evil man has repented and the righteous has been rewarded". Kurtzweil (Masot, p. 24) and Y. Keshet (Havdalot, Pirkei Agnon, p. 95) have a similar approach.  
  
This chapter proves the above to be incorrect. Agnon criticizes where it is due, though he does it subtly and almost invisibly.
89. The Talmud, in Brachot 7, a, states that a name is likely to influence the personality of its bearer. Agnon himself often names the protagonists of his stories according to their character.
90. See below p. 23-24 about the importance which Agnon attaches to the timing of the appearance of the secondary but important character.
91. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 8
92. ibid. p. 99
93. ibid. p. 204
94. p. 232 R. Horowitz (Ikuv HaShelichut, in Moznayim, Av Elul

5728, p. 178) claims that R. Yudel was deliberately misleading when he wrote the conditions. Not so - he was merely expressing his faith.

95. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 390
96. Shabbat 59,2 See also, ibid 63  
Moed Katan 16,2  
Baba Metziah, 85,1
97. "The Bridal Canopy", p. 338
98. Taanit, 25,1
99. For the comparison of the rythm of the Fables of our Sages and those of Agnon, see:
  1. D. Sadan Al Shai Agnon, p. 158-159
  2. A.M. Lifshitz, Ketavim, p. 226
  3. Above p. 26
100. "The Bridal Canopy", p. 391



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SUB-PLOTS OF 'THE BRIDAL CANOPY'

## THE SUB-PLOTS OF THE BRIDAL CANOPY

In the previous chapter, following in the footsteps of Agnon critics, we pointed out that "The Bridal Canopy" is a whole unified work.<sup>1</sup> The many sub-plots in the book are there to complete the picture which the author wishes to paint for the reader.

But such a statement is not adequate. The fact is that "The Bridal Canopy" has a high concentration of sub-plots which seem to break the concentration in the main event of the book, and curtail the course of the basic plot. The continuity of the main plot will be undamaged only if the atmosphere of the sub-plots will match the theme of the central plot. The sub-plots have a function similar to that of a maidservant. She must suit herself to her mistress and to her mistress's needs. She may not wear her mistress's clothes, nor in any way attract any attention which is intended for her mistress. It is up to us, then, to clarify the real nature of the relationship between the skeleton of the work, and the tissues around it.

"It is obvious that a multitude of stories, piled on in a burst of uncontrolled association, will destroy any work of art unless it is controlled by design. Indeed, only by right of the motifs, which joins the stories internally and externally, does the work stand erect. The motifs inevitably have to blend and join in the entire work, and they are both means and end."<sup>2</sup>

Before we come to clarify and examine the nature of the relationship between the essence of the book and its various branches, we have to accept as axiomatic that only if we prove that the sub-plot

intensifies the concentration and awareness of the major theme of "The Bridal Canopy", will our suggestion concerning the oneness of the book be considered correct and legitimate. In other words - it is not sufficient to reveal points of contact between the sub-plots and the main plot which are external, formal, linguistic or environmental.<sup>3</sup> We must find a deeper contentual point of contact between the components of the work. Only if we find such a point of contact may we say with certainty that the various components, contrary to competing with each other, actually complete each other.

In the light of our suggestion in the previous chapter, that the theme of "The Bridal Canopy" is man's struggle with himself, it seems that this theme unifies the entire novel, for it appears in the majority of the sub-plots. In some of the sub-plots, Agnon states the theme clearly, whilst in others he conceals more than he reveals.

Two of the short stories, one following the other, deal distinctly with "man's trials". The two are "Woodcutter" and "The Rabbi and the Guest."

In "Woodcutter"<sup>4</sup> we read:

"The woman thought in her heart .... by my life and by the lives of my husband and daughters, long may they live, any grace which the Holy One, Blessed be He, will do to us, we will do with the poor. Satan smiled and said: we shall wait and see."<sup>5</sup>

After the woodcutter and his wife overcome the trial of temptation, Agnon ends the story with a short rhyme:

"End of the woodcutters tale  
Who withstood the trial  
And gave up his home  
And cared not for his money."<sup>6</sup>

The case in "The Rabbi and the Guest"<sup>7</sup> is similar:

"Let it be known that as long as there are  
new in the world, Satan envies them, and  
they undergo many trials all the time. Of  
the early fathers it was said (Genesis 22):  
and the Lord tried Abraham, but now Satan  
tries the righteous, and his is oft disguised  
as a righteous man and oft as a wicked man."<sup>8</sup>

The Rabbi succeeded, and here, too, Agnon ends with a rhyme,  
similar in structure and content to the one at the end of  
"Woodcutter".

"End the tale of the Rabbi and the Guest  
A pleasant joyous tale  
Lucky is he who is brave<sup>9</sup>  
And overcomes and is victorious."<sup>10</sup>

Let us now go along "The Bridal Canopy" and look at those tales  
in which the element of man's struggle with his negative tendencies,  
with his Yetzer Hara<sup>11</sup> is evident. Then we will discuss those  
stories in which this element is not so obvious.

### A Pot Story<sup>12</sup>

Netta the wagoner tells the story lightly, humorously, almost  
cheerfully. But it ends on a serious note:

"before I should complain against her I ought to  
complain about myself for being in such a hurry  
to eat."<sup>13</sup>

In other words: all the trouble which befell me is my fault, for I did not control myself in the time of my hunger.

Agnon wanted us to understand the story in this manner, for immediately after Netta's conclusion comes R. Yudil's remark - warning:

"To teach you that Noah did not blame his drunkenness on other people, saying, they gave me wine and I became drunk; but he put the blame on himself and on his wine."

Each man must accept full responsibility for his actions.

The story of the Two Eyed Rabbi and the story of the One Eyed Preacher. 14

The one eyed preacher stands at the very bottom of the scale of negative preachers and speakers which Agnon describes, and he can be classed with R. Grunam Yekum Purkan, Falk, Shpaltelder, Askanowitz, Deiksil and others. He is narrow minded and amazingly selfish:

"... because you don't see anything but yourself and anybody who doesn't see anything more than himself doesn't need more than one eye." 15

And one such as this preaches and lectures to the community and advises them to shed tears for their deeds! The irony in Agnon's description is obvious. One who has not troubled himself to know himself, to struggle with himself, comes to correct the ways of the community. It is obvious that he can expect nothing more than disregard and disappointment.

Agnon hints that a moral is to be learned from the Preachers failure:

"Until here the Tale  
Of the three Eyes  
And if you have a soul  
May it serve you for eyes." 16

Shlomo Yaakov's Bed 17

We see Shlomo Yaakov's heroic struggle with himself, his Yetzer Hara his youthful lust:

"... Shlomo Yaakov takes off his vest, pours forth his heart before the merciful God that he may be delivered from thoughts of transgression .... and in addition, unpleasant pains troubled him. The whole world might as well have been laid waste and only women left.... Satan raises before his eyes the face of that gentile woman who cleans the Close each week, also the wet nurse at the warden's house, who once bared a breast and squirted a jet of milk in his face..." 18

And Shlomo Yaakov sighs from the burden of thoughts of transgression which are harder to bear than transgression itself. Whilst feeling helpless, sensing that he is losing his battle and is being lost in defilement, he fights back, struggling bitterly and obstinately a pure struggle for the sanctification of the Lord's name:

"he neglected his own sorrow and insult and cried out for the Divine Presence's insult 19.... weeping from the overflow of his broken heart .... I know that I am a low and worthless creature and am unworthy of having even a hair's breath of pleasure from your world; so either take my soul or leave me as a dumb stone lying in its place without sin. And he would seize his chest with his two hands, pressing his nails into the flesh of his heart and would stand half naked and weeping in the Close until his blood cooled off." 20

Only an artist of Agnon's calibre can give us such a powerful and shocking description of suffering and courage bound together. Everything is against the pathetic young man - his heart, flesh, blood demand their due, and he can tolerate it no more - he has reached an abyss. "Leave me as a stone" - he has nothing to support him, and he battles empty handed, with only his ten nails - "Pressing his nails into the flesh of his heart" - it seems to me that this is one of Agnon's peaks in describing the greatness and courage of the human soul.

It is worth noticing that Shlomo Yaakov's tale is told by Heshel the maskil (enlightened) within the framework of the tale "Torah and Greatness". That which happened to the one happened to the other:

"Shlomo Yaakov's betrothed had fled with her gentile lover".<sup>21</sup>

while about Heshel it was said:

"Yehoshua Heshel is cut off from his bride,  
Yehoshua Heshel is cut off from the house of  
R. Menachem Manesh." <sup>22</sup>

Heshel is the complete opposite of Shlomo Yaakov - Heshel is led by two tempters - his heart and his eyes. <sup>23</sup>

"But the truth of the matter was that Yehoshua Heshel's heart did not turn to the daughter of R. Menachem Manesh, for ever since he ate at the widow's he had his eyes on her daughter, Chasya." <sup>24</sup>

Even at the time of his failure, his eyes play a prominent role:

"... at that time the visage of Chasya appeared to him ...." <sup>25</sup>

It seems as though Heshel is justifying his own actions. He seems to say: see what befell Shlomo Yaakov despite his innocence, his righteousness, and the torment in his soul. We have here what is clearly a repudiation of the concept of "reward and retribution", a statement that "there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked and to the good and to the clean and to the unclean .... that there is one event unto all."<sup>26</sup> This approach befits Heshel after "leaving the ranks".

We have already dealt extensively with the three stories of R. Yisrael Shlomo, and there is no need to dwell on them again, but it is clear that their central theme is the struggle, or rather - lack of struggle, by their central character.

### The Tale of Mechel, the Beadle 27

Mechel the Beadle's eventual failure is due to the fact that he forgoes aliyan to Eretz Yisrael, because of "second yomtov (the second day of the religious holidays, which is celebrated only in the diasporah) of the Diasporah". Mechel the Beadle admired the comfortable life in the Diasporah, and prefers it over the difficult travels to Eretz Yisrael and the hard life there . . . . "The Second day of the Festivals appeared to him in a dream with a shamed and blackened face . . . and he realized that it was hard for him to change the holiness of the Second Day for the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael".<sup>28</sup> And R. Yudil Chassid, who respects every man, and despises no creature, despised him for that:

".... said R. Yudil Chassid, the only person I envied in my life was a certain woman who went up to Eretz Yisrael, nor did I ever despise anyone except R. Mechel, the Beadle, who might have ascended and did not ascend."<sup>29</sup>

Mechel the Beadle did not have the strength to choose the good, the positive - the aliyan to Eretz Yisrael. He is therefore found guilty by the author, and is looked down upon even by the usually tolerant and accommodating R. Yudil Chassid.

### The Story of the "Cheap" Cantor or The Wings of Song 30

The reader will wonder who is worse than whom - is the Cantor worse than the One Eyed Preacher, or vice versa? Both belong to the category of those who mislead the public without shame or conscience. The cheek and inequity of the cantor makes an entire congregation feel that:



"... when a butcher offers forbidden meat for sale, the All Merciful preserve us, we break the utensils in which the meat was cooked, but when a cantor goes wrong what's to be done? Can we take it out of the prayer books and the Orders of Festival Prayers?"

Ephraim's singing is pleasant, but what of his intentions? The difference between his appearance and character is hinted at during his prayers at the synagogue over the new year: 32

"... for while he was praying one young man pulled aside the edge of Ephraim's talit (prayer shawl) thinking to find him swimming in tears; and Ephraim poked out his tongue at him." 33

Ephraim does not care for his prayers, and does not care for his congregation. His actions on the Eve of the Day of Atonement make him a sinner and a cause of others to sin, and of the likes of him was said:

"Whoever sins and causes others to sin, is not given leave to repent." 34

### Work 35

A stonemason's holiness is in his work, which he does completely, not allowing any outside thought to come between him and his labour. By sheer dedication the apparently simple stonemason raises himself to such a height that even the zaddik (righteous man)

"bowed ..... his head before him and said to him, master bless me." 36

In the light of all that was said in this chapter, we may therefore accept the assumption that the dozen sub-plots of "The Bridal Canopy" (this includes the stories of R. Yisrael Shlomo) are unified by a single theme. Despite the seeming divergence and variety in the superficial level of the stories - from the simplicity and earthiness

in "A Pot Story" to the purity and glow of "Work", from Shlomo Yaakov's self torture to the Cantor's lightheartedness, and there is a single unifying factor - man's struggle with himself. The results of the struggles vary, as do its intensities, and the willingness of the struggler to struggle. Lack of struggle and its results - with all its negative implications - also fall into this category, as Agnon has shown us with R. Yisrael Shlomo and his hideousness.

These dozen tales are the majority of the sub-plots in "The Bridal Canopy". I did not mention the others, a minority, because Agnon's "theme" does not appear in them, though in some of them it makes some appearance. Reb. Yerachmiel the teacher, for example, does not hesitate to offer his meager savings to the Inn-Keeper who is in trouble (The Generations of a Man)<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in "The Birth of Yaakov Shimshon", we see Yaakov Shimshon's father trying to stand on his own, against relations' pressure.

It has become clear that "The Bridal Canopy" is one unit, and the unifying factor, which links main plot to sub-plots, is not external, but on an idea which is central to Agnon. "The Bridal Canopy", describes as Agnon saw it and as he wanted the reader to see it, is one of the pillars of the Agnonian world.

However, he does not idealize the world he describes, even though, with all that it personally meant for him, he longs for it.

# REFERENCE AND NOTES TO 'SUB-PLOTS TO "THE BRIDAL CANOPY"'.

1. See above page 39-40
2. M. Tochner Pesher Agnon p. 38
3. Two have dealt widely with this topic: M. Tochner and S. Werses. Tochner suggests as connecting links the following subjects: marriage of a poor bride, hospitality, the location of telling the stories, such as round a table or on a journey. etc. (Pesher Agnon, p. 27-49). It must be noted that these are structural-external links, and not internal-essential. Werses sees the following as uniting the book: semantics (Netta repeats the phrase "I dipped my bread in milk fat", "he brought me a loaf" etc.) and the fact that those who tell the stories or appear in them know R. Yudil. (Al Hamivneh Shel Hachnasat Kala, in Sippur Veshorsho, p. 169-182). Once again, these are external features of the book.
4. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 300-305
5. ibid. p. 301
6. ibid. p. 305
7. ibid. p. 307-312. This story resembles the one in Kiddushin 81, 1-2.
8. ibid. p. 307
9. "Who is brave? He who conquers his Yetzer" Ethics of the Fathers, 4, 1.
10. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 312
11. At this stage, the results of the struggle are immaterial. Our assumption will be proved correct if we prove the existence of that struggle.
12. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 24-29
13. ibid. p. 29
14. ibid. p. 43-45

15.     ibid. p. 45
16.     ibid.
17.     ibid. p. 65-73
18.     ibid. p. 66
19.     Human sins cause pain to the Divine Presence.  
See M.Y. Herczl, Shai Olamot Le Hachnasat Kala, p. 38, 66.
20.     "The Bridal Canopy" p. 66-67
21.     ibid. p. 72
22.     ibid. p. 81
23.     Numbers 15, 34: ".... and ye shall not seek after your  
own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a  
whoring". Rasi comments that "the heart and eyes  
spy for the body and pimp transgressions for it. The  
eyes see and the heart covets."
24.     "The Bridal Canopy" p. 76-77
25.     ibid. p. 80
26.     Ecclesiastes, 9, 2-3
27.     "The Bridal Canopy" p. 191 - 196
28.     ibid. p. 290
29.     ibid.
30.     ibid. p. 148 - 155
31.     ibid. p. 154
32.     See below p.       for the importance of the idea  
motivating any action.
33.     "The Bridal Canopy" p. 152
34.     Yoma 87, 1   Sotta, 47, 1
35.     "The Bridal Canopy" p. 183 - 185
36.     ibid. p. 185

37.    ibid. p. 15 - 20
38.    ibid. p. 198 - 199

CHAPTER FIVE

ADDITIONAL STORIES OF "THOSE GOOD OLD DAYS"

## ADDITIONAL STORIES OF "THOSE GOOD OLD DAYS"

After a thorough examination of "The Bridal Canopy" and its sub-plots, we must concentrate on those stories which Agnon critics tend to class with "The Bridal Canopy", stories which are, by definition, of "Those Good Old Days".

This chapter will see a criticism of those stories. The starting point for the analysis will be the Agnonian text, and we will try to discover the extent of the human struggle motif in these stories, and the attitude Agnon displays towards it. Also, we will examine whether or not in these stories, which describe the past generations, there is any idealization of persons, institutions or a community.

### HANIDACH<sup>1</sup>

Most critics of Agnon agree that his writing is characterized by its quiet, restrained style. An outburst of emotion is rare. Often an apparent tranquility shields fierce struggles which are taking place in other, deeper levels,<sup>2</sup> but generally, Agnon maintains a tranquil quiet, while the plot slowly takes its course.

This story is different. It contains description of emotions in such intensity as to be almost unique in all of Agnon's writing. One example of this is the shocking stubborn stance of the old Mitnaged (opposer of Chasidism) R. Avigdor, who is standing by his only daughter's deathbed:

"R. Avigdor lowered his two ancient eyes onto his only daughter, as she was dying, and his heavy tears fell into her tears and he strengthened himself and thought of the merciful Almighty, and prayed that he would have compassion upon her and send His aid from high. Then he thought in his heart, perhaps people would think that his daughter Aidele was cured by virtue of Uriel, and people would fall through her. So R. Avigdor lifted up his eyes to the Heaven and said, Master of the universe, please take her soul immediately, so the powers of falsehood in the universe will not be strengthened by her. A few minutes later, body came to its end, and her pure soul departed."<sup>3</sup>

R. Avigdor needed a great deal of faith in the cause for which he fought in order to reach such a level of devotion and sacrifice. The section quoted echoes certain phrases from what is generally accepted as the supreme symbol of sacrifice and devotion, namely the binding of Isaac for sacrifice, by Abraham.

In the Bible - a single son. In our text - a single daughter. In both cases - an old father. Both cases see blind faith, and self denial almost to the extent of annulment of the ego. Of course, the most obvious common factor is the sacrifice of a loved child on the alter of an abstract idea.

To confirm the resemblance to the scene from Genesis, Agnon's phrase "and his heavy tears fell into her tears" is borrowed from the Midrashi "and his (Abraham's) eyes were shedding tears and his tears fell into the eyes of Isaac".<sup>4</sup>

However, the Midrash continues with "... and of father's mercy". In our tale, Agnon erases all pity from the father's heart and throws (as does the father) the mercy onto God "... of the merciful Almighty, and prayed that He would have compassion upon his daughter" R. Avigdor is a man more zealous of what to him was God's will than was Abraham.<sup>5</sup>



The schism between R. Avigdor and his son-in-law, R. Meshulam further adds to the tension in the story. It was R. Meshulam, Aidele's husband, "who went down to the village to Rabbi Uriel, to ask him to pray for mercy for Aidele his wife, that she should not die." <sup>6</sup>

Tension is added by the Chassidims outburst against R. Avigdor.

"His (Rabbi Uriel's) chasidim stood up and cried out that he should revenge their enemies and punish them fittingly, for Heavens name that was besmirched by them and for the pleasure of Shabat which they caused to cease .... nature overcame him and he cursed the warden, and a grievous curse was torn from his lips...." <sup>7</sup>

The full gravity of "a grievous curse" is to be conceived only from the examination of its origin. In his will to his son Solomon, King David tells of Shimei the son of Gera "which cursed me with a grievous curse" <sup>8</sup> The Gemarah <sup>9</sup> sees the Hebrew word for grievous as the initials for "He is an adulterer, he is a Moabite, he is a murderer, he is a foe, he is an abomination."

The very idea of revenge should be alien to any Jew, and even more so to Chasidim in their Rabbi's court. However, revenge is present in our story, and it casts its shadow on both sides of the fence, namely both on Chasidim and the Mithagdim.

A major tension in the story is that in Gershom's soul, his doubts and queries increasing the drama, and his fainting on the road, will all that it signifies, is one of the highlights to the reader. After the chozer (returner secret emissary of chasidism) visits R. Avigdor's home, Gershom changes, but Agnon leaves a central question unanswered: Does Gershom know that he worships God in the manner of the chasidim? Is he aware of the fact that by applying that which the Chozer taught him, he has become one of the superior members of the sect?

The fact that this question is not answered only increases the tension, which reaches a new height with Gershom saying:

"Let my bones burn in hell, if only a small grain from them will reach you, God." <sup>10</sup>

After reaching such elevation, after such fusion of spiritual and material, there is only one way for the author to pursue: he must end the tale, and end it with Gershom's pointless death. Reading of this death of purification and devotion is in itself elevating, but Agnon does not let us remain on these newly reached heights -

"So died Gershom, grandson of R. Avigdor, because R. Avigdor had contended with R. Uriel, and had quarreled with Chasidim." <sup>11</sup>

This, to say the least, dampens the excitement. It is as though Agnon mocks us for believing that Gershom gained happiness by virtue of his devotion, complete faith, and pure love for his God. Not at all, we are told, all that has happened is no more than petty stocktaking - R. Avigdor is punished for his deeds. The end of the story is "an eye for an eye" - revenge at its cruellest, and this, in turn, throws a new light on all that preceded it.

Throughout the story, it seems that Gershom and his floundering are at the core of the tale. After being led to the solution of Gershom's problem, and after witnessing his death, we are told that it is his grandfather, R. Avigdor, who is at the core. Let us then examine R. Avigdor and his rivals, the Chasidim.

At first it seems as though R. Avigdor resembles a personality already dealt with in this work - R. Yisrael Shlomo. Both are wardens, and both are strong, dominating types. We have already examined Agnon's attitude to R. Yisrael Shlomo. What, then, does he say about R. Avigdor?

He is aggressive and despotic, singlemindedly hating those who do not follow the path which according to his understanding leads to worshipping the Creator in the only correct manner. For this reason, he negates not only the Chassidim and their way of life, but also his own flesh and blood, his beloved grandson:

"R. Avigdor looked and saw the assiduous scholar and what he was reading. <sup>12</sup> He wanted to scold him, but he had already said the prayers before sleep, so he stood silent." <sup>13</sup>

Throughout the story we hear echos of R. Avigdor's religious outlook; based solely on study of Torah.

"R. Avigdor honoured the Rabbi of the Province by asking him to speak of Torah at his table." <sup>14</sup>

and so on and so forth.

It is natural that in his capacity as warden, he tries to prevent any schism amongst his community. For the same reason he forbids the holding of a separate service:

".... for R. Avigdor did not permit the holding of a minyan outside of the town, lest the charity which the villagers give when they come to pray in town lessen." <sup>15</sup>

His concern for the unity of his community and his zealous belief that his mode of worship is the only one acceptable make him almost insane in his hatred of the Chasidim. We have already mentioned his request cum prayer for his daughter's death, "so that the powers of falsehood in the universe will not be strengthened by her". Nor does he hesitate to drive the Chassidim out of the town with the onset of the Sabbath.

Agnon deals very harshly with R. Avigdor after this act, saying:

".... the act of Satan succeeded and an officer was sent to drive R. Uriel from the town, for R. Avigdor has spoken badly of him." <sup>16</sup>

The word used for officer is Greek and the origin is used when referring to oppressors, <sup>17</sup> while the phrases "spoke badly of him" is Biblical in origin <sup>18</sup> and refers to the spies who gave the Land a bad name. This phrase, too, also has only negative connotations.

Moreover, the expulsion of the Chassidim caused a defiling of the name of God, <sup>19</sup> which is so severe a transgression that only death, and not even the Day of Atonement, may atone for it. <sup>20</sup>

In contrast with R. Avigdor's harsh learnedness, the worship of the Chassidim and their leader, R. Uriel, is described with great charm. While for the mitnagdim there is a fixed criterion for judging a man and his value to society, namely, his knowledge of Torah, among the Chassidim this criterion is not at all valid. Though there are substantial differences in their mode of worship and in the extent of their struggles with Yetzer Hara, this is in no way based on learnedness.

The Rabbi, R. Uriel, stands at the head of the hierarchy he was conducting, the service, and when he sang Lecha Dodi, he actually transcended bodiliness .... <sup>21</sup> He is all spirituality, and even when busying himself with the physical, he concerns himself not with it but with honouring the Divine Presence and the Sabbath. " He sighed from the depth of his heart for the children of the Holy One, Blessed be He, who received the Sabbath in garments such as these." <sup>22</sup>

Below the Rabbi in the hierarchy are his Chassidim, who do not separate spiritual and material:

"They remembered the members of their households and returned to their sighs. Oh, Sarah - Leah, Rivka - Devora Dvora - Sushi, where are your chalot (plaited Sabbath loaves), each of which is bigger than the oven itself, oh where are the fish." 23

The Chassidim long for two things - bread and fish, both of which symbolize lust. Bread: "save the bread which he did eat." 24 Rashi says - "it is his wife, but he spoke clearly." The fish "and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth", 25 which Rashi explains "as those fish which are fruitful and multiply". These two symbols are familiar in our literature. As a result of these thoughts "they found themselves in another world, and the light of the Sabbath disappeared". 26 Their situation is worsening and they are deteriorating almost unrecognizably, "and if not for the neighing of the horses in the stable, one would not guess them to be alive." 27

Following in the footsteps of the sources, Agnon uses horses to symbolize lust and depravity. 28 Impure thoughts overcome the Chassidim and overwhelm their entire being. It seems that they will be defeated in their struggle against their Yetzer Hara. However, they are admonished by the Rabbi:

"he rebuked them in gentle tones, saying, I am ashamed for you, Chassidim, before the Almighty and before the Sabbath queen." 29

His words elevate the physical to spiritual heights.

"immediately their hearts awakened and the spirit of life entered them, and they drank toasts and said blessings and all those who could sing - sang, making it pleasant for the others, until they finished their meal and said benediction after the food." 30

In the case of the Chassidim, the struggle is very real, as their Yetzer Hara is perpetually trying to lure them, and they overcome only with the aid of their Rabbi. The Rabbi's attitude towards making the body rejoice comes as an answer to their innermost thoughts - the body must get its due, but in such a way that physical joy will have spiritual meaning. In this way, the Rabbi will have no reason to be ashamed of them, nor will they be shamed in their own eyes, before the Almighty and before the Sabbath queen.

The innkeeper stands below in the Chassidim. "The innkeeper was filled with a simpleton's joy. This Avigdor who doesn't allow them to have a minyan in the village, now the Lord has brought a matter to annoy him." <sup>31</sup>

Below the innkeeper - the old man from the village, who is ignorant, superstitious and naive. "and the old man took his cape, wrapped the Torah Scroll and went to the inn." <sup>32</sup> When they sat down for their post Shabbat meal, and it seemed as though the Mitnagdim had come to banish them from the village;

"The old man from the village stood up and shouted with all his strength that which one shouts when enemies come upon him, "My head is the head of a lion and your head is the head of a pig. I see you as a dog, with your mother's insides in your mouth."

This is primitiveness of the very low type.

Yet, despite its heterogeneity, the Chassidim form a unified group of men who share the desire to worship their Creator to the best of their ability. The pressures brought on by the mitnagdim, either directly or through the authorities, unify them further.

Their mode of worship is essentially different from that of the Mitnagd im. In describing the Chassidim, the element of harshness which Agnon applies to R. Avigdor is missing, and he handles them with a gentle and lyrical pen:

" .... a simple and wonderful man with simple beliefs ... a Jew who came to us from the world of song .... and that love which awakened began ascending and elevating itself to the Single One of the universe .... The men of action were shocked and sat down to do a grace with the Divine Presence ... they sat down and poured the cups and drank Lechayim (to life), until all bodiliness left them." <sup>34</sup>

Clearly, Hanidach describes man's struggle with himself. With R. Avigdor, this struggle is less complex than with the Chassidim, but it is similar in that each behaves in what he believes to be the best interests of the Divine Presence. In dealing with this, Agnon touches on another point of interest to Jews over the past few generations - the relationship between Chassidim, which is rebellious, and the official "establishment" of Mitnagd im. Our story takes place two generations after the death of the Besht. <sup>35</sup> Agnon does not discuss the development of the conflict between the two factions, but rather deals with the different approaches to worship.

Does Agnon take a stand in the debate between the rivals?

It seems that he sides with the Chassidim:

- i) R. Avigdor is the persecutor and the Chassidim are the persecuted, and Agnon sides with the persecuted. <sup>36</sup>
- ii) He describes R. Avigdor harshly, while dealing gently with the Chassidim.
- iii) The fate of the floundering young man is very touching.
- iv) Agnon accuses R. Avigdor of being responsible for Gershom's death, after accusing him of the death of Eidele, his daughter and Gershom's mother.

Though from all the above it would seem as though Agnon definitely sides with the Chassidim, the above is merely circumstantial evidence, and the proof of his siding with R. Avigdor is far more clear cut.

In the feast which R. Avigdor holds for his son-in-law, R. Meshulam, one of the guests is one officer by the name of:

"R. Yosef Shmuel who was named after his grandfather R. Yosef Shmuel who learned Torah standing up for twenty five years and learned the entire Shas (Talmud) forty two times, thus fulfilling the commandment - and you shall speak of them." <sup>37</sup>

Who is this R. Yosef Shmuel?

The fact that he shares his two names with R. Shmuel Yosef Agnon, the author is no coincidence. The fact that the officer's grandfather learned standing up, further enhances this identity for Agnon wrote and learned while standing. <sup>38</sup>

Moreover, the officer's grandfather learned the Shas forty two times, thus fulfilling "and you shall speak of them" Of Agnon's own grandfather we read that:

"My grandfather was warden for forty years but he retired eventually because he wanted to complete the Shas for the forty second time, and so fulfilled the mitzvah of "and you shall speak of them". <sup>39</sup>

Having proved Agnon's identity with the officer and hence his presence at the warden's meal, we may now come to certain conclusions as to Agnon's stand.



We have already seen <sup>40</sup> that Agnon chooses his fellows at a meal. In this chapter, the phrase "the refined of Jerusalem would not go in for a meal unless they knew who would sit down with them", used by Agnon at the royal banquet after being awarded the Nobel Prize, is used. Agnon is present at the warden's banquet, but reverses the order of his private names, <sup>41</sup> thus using a slight disguise.

This clearly indicates Agnon's ambivalent attitude to R. Avigdor, to the Chassidim, and to the strife between them. We might in fact be witnesses to dichotomy between Agnon's personal feelings towards R. Avigdor and the Chassidim, and the feelings he has as an author.

Agnon the author deals severely with R. Avigdor, while treating the Chassidim forgivingly. As the story was written by Agnon the author, such feelings are present throughout the tale. However, Agnon himself came from a family of wardens and community leaders, and he does not turn his back to R. Avigdor, seeing in him the glory of his ancestry. He values and admires the patriarchal figure of R. Avigdor. His honesty, innocence, consistency and decency are never doubted - all his actions are for heaven's sake, and in this he differs radically from another warden of our acquaintance - R. Yisrael Shlomo.

Agnon the man admires R. Avigdor despite the latter's weakness, and leaves any criticism in the hands of Agnon the author. The author is objective, not ignoring weaknesses even in the most important member of a community, and criticizing where criticism is due. He does not posit a world of "good old days", artfully describing the past as it is.

However, Agnon wants to express his personal admiration for R. Avigdor, and he does this by consenting to dine at his table, though in disguise.

We learn more of Agnon's dual attitude to R. Avigdor from that which happens to each of the warden's two grandsons.

Gershom dies, because "R. Avigdor had quarrelled with R. Uriel, and had contended with Chassidim". R. Avigdor is guilty of defiling the name of God, which carries with it a sentence of death. The sentence is postponed, and the debt is paid by his grandson.

But R. Avigdor isn't entirely guilty. On the contrary, his good deeds outweigh the bad. For this reason, R. Avigdor's other grandson, R. Moshe, who is Gershom's brother, is privileged and ascends to Eretz Yisrael - he is one of the Nilbavim in "Bilvav Yamim"<sup>42</sup> In that story, he is accompanied by none other than R. Shmeul Yosef son of R. Shalan Mordechai Halevi in person. Agnon is here presented in his full name in its correct order. Agnon the man and Agnon the author are united.

Quarrels of past generations are forgotten. There is no memory of the ~~ferwar~~ of the past, and reconciliation is complete.<sup>43</sup> Peace, tranquility and brotherhood reign among the Nilbavim, of whom Agnon is one, who go up to Eretz Yisrael.

## REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "HANIDACH"

1. Elu Ve'Elu p. 9-55
2. "The tension and dynamism which are revealed to the reader who studies the "simple" types in Agnon's stories are internal in two senses. Firstly, almost nothing occurs on the surface. That is, the major events are not external". (B. Kurtzweil, Masot p. 15,16)  
"The language, which is weighted, balanced thrifty and seemingly tranquil, serves as camouflage for the dynamic tension" (ibid. p. 347)  
See also M.Y. Herczl Shai Olamot-Hachnasat Kalah, intro. p. 3
3. Elu Ve'Elu p. 25
4. Bereshit Rabba 56,11
5. The dramatic tension of this section is increased by the name it bears - "trial", following the words of Genesis (22,1) - "and God did try Abraham". The opening words of the section "and R. Avigdor perceived all that was done" also imply a state of despair, for they are taken from the Book of Esther. "And Mordechai perceived all that was done" (Esther, 4,1) is said after a death sentence is passed over the entire Jewish community, and danger looms large and real.
6. Elu Ve'Elu p. 25 As a result of this, R. Avigdor prayed for his daughter's death.
7. ibid. p. 12
8. Kings I 2,8
9. Shabbat 105,1
10. Elu Ve'Elu p. 55
11. It must be noted that G. Shaked holds a different view. He sees "Hanidach" as a "story with a wide plot .... a complete and correct world standing on firm foundations .... tranquility before breakage and storm .... the perfection of a feudal or semi feudal world ...." and other similar remarks (Rivdei MaShmait Shonim Batechnika Shel Hanidach, in Moznaim, vol. 27, 3-4, 5728, p. 201-210)

12. Gershom was reading Reshit Chochma, a non Talmudic book of moral guidance. Though it is accepted as a guide to good deeds, serious Talmud scholars do not consider it worthy of serious study.
13. Elu Ve'Elu p. 14
14. *ibid.* p. 46
15. *ibid.* p. 16. see also p. 13.
16. *ibid.* p. 11
17. See also: Shabbat 32,1  
Sukkah, 56,2  
Babba Kamah 38,1
18. Numbers 13,32
19. Elu Ve'Elu p. 12
20. Yomma 86, 1. Avot de Rabbi Nathan 29,5
21. Elu Ve'Elu p. 13 see also p. 22
22. *ibid.*
23. *ibid.* p. 13
24. Genesis 39,6
25. *ibid.* 48,16
26. Elu Ve'Elu p. 14
27. *ibid.*
28. Ezekiel, 23,20: "...doted upon their paramours whose issue is like the issue of horses" Kohellet Rabba I compares man, at various stages in his life, to different animals: "... at twenty as a neighing horse, beautifying himself in quest of a woman". "Six things were said of horses: loves promiscuity ... and is coarse in spirit (Pesachim, 103,2, Tanchuma, 491,6). Agnon often

mentions horses in this context. In "Shlomo Yaakov's Bed" ("The Bridal Canopy" p. 69) the horse image is used to emphasize the sensuality of the Leaser's fat daughter. In "A whole loaf" (Samuch VeNireh p. 147-8) Gressler is mocking .... and making fools of all men with his horses. Gressler (see above p.13 ) is the symbol of Yetzer Hara.

29. Elu Ve'Elu p. 14
30. ibid.
31. ibid. p. 13
32. ibid. p. 16 - Clearly, the old man transgressed the prohibition of carrying on Shabbat, which is forbidden from the Torah. Reading from his scroll constitutes "a mitzvah carried out with the aid of a transgression". Had R. Avigdor been in R. Uriel's place, would he have read from that scroll?
33. ibid. p. 19
34. ibid. p. 20-21
35. The Besht died in 1790, and the story happens in 1815. (See above p. 2 )
36. "And God seeketh that which is pursued" Ecclesiastes, 3,15
37. Elu Ve'Elu p. 43-48. The letters (B.M.) which make up the word "of them" in Hebrew have a numerical value of forty two.
38. See below p. 234
39. Al Kapot Haman-ul, p. 321. For the authenticity of Agnon's story, and for his personal identity with the teller, see A.Y. Braver, Bine-areinu Uvizkeneinu, in Yuval Shai, p. 39-47
40. See above p. 54

41. As opposed to his participation in the Nilbavim's aliyah, in which he participates correctly named. See Elu Ve'Elu p. 490.
42. ibid. p. 400
43. Moreover, following R. Moshe, grandson of the zealous R. Avigdor in the list of Olim is one R. Yehuda Mendil, a remnant of the Chassidim of the Rabbi, R. Uriel! (ibid. p. 490)

## VEHAYA HEAKOV LEMISHOR<sup>1</sup>

(AND THE CROOKED SHALL BE STRAIGHT)

The reader of VeHaya HeAkov LeMishor inevitably compares it to "The Bridal Canopy" - in both stories, the central character embarks on a journey to raise money. A careful reading, however, will show that this is where the resemblance ends.

The question should be asked - why did R. Yudil succeed where Menashe Chaim failed so cruelly, ending his life in the shadow of the tombstones, having lost his humanity and all purpose? Why is one smiled upon, while fate frowns upon the other?<sup>2</sup>

To answer this question, a thorough examination must be made of those events which appear in both stories and are apparently similar. The criterion for judging whether this similarity is essential and deep, or merely superficial, must be the intention governing the event, and the attitudes of the persons involved.

There are many similar occurrences in the stories, and a comparison follows:

1. When Menashe Chaim prepares for his journey, we read:

"All hope is gone . . . . a sharp sword is threatening . . . . The bitterness made him shed tears saltier than the sea . . . . and he wept bitterly."<sup>3</sup>

Sadness and sorrow, grief and lamentation, and all this after months in which Menashe Chaim and his wife did not have the strength to realize the situation they were in, and ignored the harsh facts of their existence.

R. Yudel's preparations are completely different. Frumit approaches the Rabbi of Apta with the utmost simplicity, and with the self same simplicity he advises her. After that, she discusses the details of the match with the Rabbi, as though the groom is already waiting, and the marriage is only delayed by the trivialities.

2. The difference in the protagonists approach towards their departure from the town is even more marked. R. Yudel's departure almost takes on the nature of a carnival, with everything being done publicly:

"And he parted with the Rabbi and went to the other important people in the town, to be blessed by them and returned to his wife and daughters .... and when his neighbours heard of his journey, they all came. R. Yudel took three of his friends, and recited Shir HaMaalot before them .... he got onto the wagon, .... and the members of his household cried out "May you go in life and blessing and success", and all his neighbours cried out "Go in joy and peace without any harm, and may you return home soon". Then he began to sing Adir Ayom Venorah <sup>4</sup> (mighty, one, powerful one, awesome one).

Such a departure is positive. R. Yudel is journeying to achieve something, and his mission is clear to him. He knows that he is on a voyage for a Mitzvah, and as the messenger of the Rabbi of Apta, his success is ensured.

Menashe Chaim's departure is entirely negative. It is an escape, and hence sorrow dominates the description of his exit:



".... she cried bitterly and shouted out ... and Menashe Chaim could not say anything to her, as his tears had stifled his throat ... before he departed, he spoke to God, tears on his cheeks, saying, "Master of the Universe, by your grace, I pray that I shall never beg at the doors of the rich .... and the tears boiled in his eyes ...." <sup>5</sup>

3. Before he leaves, Kreindel Tshorney asks her husband when he will return. No one asks R. Yudil this question, for it is obvious that he will return when the Rabbi's blessing will be fulfilled.

4. Menashe Chaim's alms collecting is self degrading:

".... How much more lowliness is there in this? How much more disgrace? Will it bring any more ruination." <sup>6</sup>

In time, he loses all self respect, and becomes a professional beggar.

R. Yudil is no beggar. He enables his hosts to participate in the Mitzvah of hospitality to a guest and in the Mitzvah of arranging a marriage for a poor bride:

"And in the home of R. Ephraim Host I learnt humility, that a man should never say "they rejoice in me", for they do not rejoice in him, but are happy to fulfill the Mitzvah of hospitality. It is like nine men who are about to pray, and they meet me and can therefore pray in a minyan. They do not rejoice in me that I am important, but because they have found a tenth to complete their minyan for them." <sup>8</sup>

5. When the letter given to R. Yudil completes its function, once he has collected two hundred gold coins, he took the letter and

"tied it to his heart as an amulet. R. Yudil said, I would not exchange this letter for the world." <sup>9</sup>

When Menashe Chaim sells the Rabbi's letter, he does it not out of being bad or out of disregard or contempt - he does it as a direct result of his weakness, of being unable to withstand the beggar's temptation, of being unwilling to fight for his own truth.

"Menashe Chaim did not know what to do, woe to him if he sells it and woe to him if he doesn't sell it ..... and while he was debating, he put his hand in his pocket and he heard the sound of the silver coins, and his heart of flesh began howling and grumbling, and his guts danced within him ..... and Menashe Chaim was looking, with his one eye towards the sin ...." <sup>10</sup>

We are here presented with the weak Menashe Chaim, standing face to face with a trial, and failing - "The pocket full of coins dragged him down, to the ground". <sup>11</sup> He had the choice of resisting the beggar, but he did not resist. He gave up the letter of his own free will, and this constitutes a sin. As "one sin brings another", <sup>12</sup> others are to follow. <sup>13</sup> This brings us to Manashe Chaim's worst failure and to the most grave of his actions.

6. He sold the Rabbi's letter to enable him to return to Kreindil Tshorney, his wife. Instead, he went to the Leshkowitz Fair. There he was tempted by the world of vanity and he gorged himself and drank to excess and lost everything by his own hand. <sup>14</sup>

The severity of this action of Menashe Chaim emerges in all its hideousness when compared with R. Yudil Chassid's behaviour after he had collected two hundred gold coins and settled down to study Torah. He, too, was confronted by agents of temptation, but had the strength to withstand them.<sup>15</sup> He had bought a mezuzah, and when he interrupted his studying, he looked at it to fulfil "I place the Lord before me always".<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, Menashe Chaim unconditionally surrenders to his Yetzer Hara. His meal at the tavern was not positively orientated - "eating in excess is only Yetzer Hara, and he who says that the more one eats the longer one lives is a liar."<sup>17</sup>

This is clearly the explanation for Menashe Chaim's failure. The seed which was sown is giving fruit - Menashe Chaim is passive throughout, being dominated by his wife, and by the beggar, and by the Innkeeper. He is unable to stand on his own, fight for his own, struggle for his humanity. For this, he fails, and drags others down with him in his descent.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the divergence in the outcome of the ventures of Menashe Chaim and R. Yudil is traceable to the divergence of their conduct and intention throughout the journey. The end of VeHaya HeAkov LeMishor must also be seen in these terms.

Menashe Chaim is riddled by doubt. He knows that his wife's life with her second husband is sinful. Kurtzweil writes:

"He has two ways open to him. One is madness, that is - permanently seeing the world as a state of nothingness, and having no ability to become free of it. The other way is resignation, personal sacrifice, a return to God, which is an acceptance of fate and a seeing of the universe as a Godly, meaningful one, in which the solutions are God's. Menashe Chaim chooses the second way, and in that lies his greatness." <sup>19</sup>

In fact, there is a third possibility, and a fourth. The third possibility is most in keeping with Menashe Chaim's weak character. The halacha distinctly states "she is henceforth forbidden to her husband and to her lover". <sup>20</sup> One could expect Menashe Chaim to announce publicly that he is alive, his wife is therefore a man's wife and therefore forbidden to her second husband. But Menashe Chaim did not do this, nor did he do what Kurtzweil maintained him to have done.

Had he behaved in this manner, the story would have ended in anticlimax, and it is unlike Agnon to end a story such as VeHaya HeAkov LeMishor with an anticlimatic note. He did not declare his wife's sins, he did not go mad, nor did he return to his God. Menashe Chaim chose the fourth possibility - rebellion against his God. In this lies his true courage.

This Menashe Chaim who had been swayed by every wind, who had been unsuccessful in all that he did, had been dominated throughout his life by his wife, this self same man rebelled against his master near the end of his days. He declares "I will sin and will not return to her, I will sin and will not return to her". <sup>21</sup> This is clearly a defiance of God and the phrase is based upon "He who says I will sin and will repent, I will sin and will repent, is not given leave to repent". <sup>22</sup> He consciously and knowingly rebels against Heaven, and does not accept its judgement. <sup>23</sup>

Menashe Chaim knows well what he is to expect following his rebellion, yet he is firm in his decision "that if there is sin in her, let him bear it, and it is better that he be cut off from both worlds than that Kreindil Tshorney be shamed and disgraced". Having revolted against his creator, he also disregards the tzaddikim (righteous men) "These will not help me".<sup>24</sup>

Only by accepting this, can we understand why Menashe Chaim did not reveal that he was alive. If, as Kurtzweil would have it, he returned to God, then he would have acted according to His commandments.

Thus, Agnon brings the story to an unexpected end, and in so doing he shows the energy and strength in the human soul, even in that of a weak man. In time of crisis, he can elevate himself to unuerpted heights, in so far as he is a man.

Therefore, despite the gloom which dominates the entire story, despite Menashe Chaim's failures and despite the shocking state in which Kreindil Tshorney is living, despite the gloomy conditions under which Menashe Chaim's life ends and despite the overall sadness - the story ends on an optimistic note.

The story is a song of praise for man's latent ability. We are witnesses to a belief, in the ability of the spark with which each man is imbued to light a large glowing fire when the need for it arises, though the spark may have been buried under ashes. There is a deep hope and faith that each wretched pathetic and low spirited man may rise to noble heights.

The theme of this story, as of most of Agnon's writings, is universal, and is discussed with a Jewish background. The true theme of the story is summarized in the words of Menashe Chaim himself:

The keys are given into the hands of man,  
and in this is the hidden secret, that the  
External keys and the Internal keys are  
given in the hands of man." <sup>25</sup>

Our approach to the main character of VeHaya HeAkov LeMishor also answers another question which seems to exist, for it would seem that the title "The Crooked shall be Straight" contradicts the content, for not only does it appear that the crooked has not become straight, but on the contrary - things have become more complicated. The interest of the story lies in the mazes and complications which it evokes. What then is the crooked which has become straight?

It is Menashe Chaim's backbone. "The crookedness of a man's heart ..... who can know it?" <sup>26</sup> Agnon knows Menashe Chaim's heart. At the end of the story, the author raised his hero to the level of those who query and ask questions on transgression and retribution, reward and punishment and Divine Justice.

The hidden secret is Menashe Chaim's rebellion. In his hands, and his hands only are given those "internal keys" which he uses to lock his heart and bar from it repentance and return to God.

## REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "VEHAYA HEAKOV LEMISHOR"

1. Elu Ve'Elu p. 57 - 127
2. Kurtzweil writes: "In the first case, the man (Menashe Chaim) was a victim of fate, while in the second case (R. Yudil Chassid) was favoured by fate". (Masot p. 204)
3. Elu Ve'Elu p. 80
4. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 9-11
5. Elu Ve'Elu p. 81-82
6. ibid. p. 83-84
7. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 9
8. ibid. p. 216
9. ibid. p. 223
10. Elu Ve'Elu p. 96
11. ibid.
12. See Avot, 4,2 Avot de Rabbi Nathan 25,4
13. Menashe Chaim's failure is preceeded by floundering. This is incompatible with Kurtzweil's theory (see note 2) of "victim of fate, for if indeed it is fate which dominates his life, whence insecurity and floundering?
14. Elu Ve'Elu p. 102-105
15. See above p. 50
16. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 224
17. Elu Ve'Elu p. 103
18. Kurtzweil negates this idea - "in fact, his fate was decided the moment he left Buczac" (Masot p. 28). This is not evident from the story. What is evident is that there is a free choice, and Menashe Chaim chose evil.

Note also Kurtzweil's idea (ibid p. 28-29) that "in VeHaya he-Akov LeMishor, one of the central topics in Agnon's work ... that of the 'fate return' appears for the first time ... in this sense, Menashe Chaim's travels symbolize the wandering of the Jews in the Diaspora ... his passive courage is elevated into a symbol of the Jewish people's passive courage throughout their exile. The late return, by its nature, cannot succeed." This may be answered in two ways.

1. If it is true that a late return is doomed to fail, how did R. Yudil succeed to find a groom for his daughter - if Menashe Chaim's can be attributed to his added stay at the Leshkowitz Fair being counted as a 'late return' - why then, R. Yudil, too, is guilty of a 'late return', and in spite of it he did not fail. On the contrary - his success can be traced to his 'late return', for the match was made during his delayed stay at the hotel.
  2. Kurtzweil compares the failed 'late return' of Menashe Chaim to the 'late return' of the Jewish nation. How is it possible to assume that Agnon would in any way imply that it is doomed to fail, as did Menashe Chaim? There is no 'late return' in the history of mankind such as that of the Jews to their land. Yet if we come to compare it to any one of Agnon's characters, it will be to R. Yudil Chassid, who fulfilled 'I have placed God before me always', knew his aim and destiny throughout his wanderings. He knew that it has an end, and when that end is reached, it will be bounteous for those who had hoped and prayed for 'return', late as it might be. Such a comparison would be appropriate.
19. Kurtzweil (Masot p. 206) sees the story as a manifestation of the concept of 'crime and punishment'. The crime - leaving home. The punishment - expulsion into a state of limbo. (ibid. p. 66) According to this, there is no proportion between the crime and the punishment. Moreover, if, as Kurtzweil would have it, Menashe Chaim did indeed fail by force of a decree, there is no place for 'crime' and



'punishment'.

20. Sota 27,2. This law applied to all Jews, irrespective whether Kohen, Levy or Israelite. It is therefore surprising the E.M. Lifshitz, (Ketavim p. 210) mentions the fact that Menashe Chaim is a Kohen in this context.

See also A. Zoref, BeShulei Sipporet VeShira, p. 23

21. Elu Ve'Elu p. 122

22. Yoma 85,2 The Hebrew for "I will return" and "I will repent" is one word - ashuv.

23. This is further proved by the fact that he spends his last days in a cemetery. Being a Kohen, he is forbidden by Jewish law from even entering a cemetery. This is no oversight by Agnon, for in Mecholae Homavet O Hane-ehavim Vehane-imim (Elu Ve'Elu p. 356) he states that "all the seed of Aharon, the Kohanim, shall not step there."

24. Elu Ve'Elu p. 123

25. ibid. p. 127

26. Jeremiah 17,9. In this chapter, Jeremiah deals with faith in God and transgression and it's retribution.

## AGUNOT<sup>1</sup>

Agunot, the first of Agnons Eretz Yisraeli writings has troubled many of his critics, for there is more than meets the eye in this charming tale.

The story seems to have a definite location and time, and yet very near the beginning we are told:

"Radiant in the light of her beauty she glows, even in these, the lands of her exile, as she did in her youth in her father's house, in the Temple of her Sovereign and the city of sovereignty, Jerusalem." <sup>2</sup>

This bridges between the time in which the congregation of Israel dwelled in "her Father's house" and the present time, when the congregation is exiled. It also bridges between the location of Jews, at present dispersed, and "the city of Sovereignty, Jerusalem". The story, then, transcends both time and place, and it is up to us to find the transcending element.

Moreover, the story contains the suffering of young people, their parents, teachers, Rabbis, and all their associates. Does this suffering have a meaning and an end?

G. Katznelson claims <sup>3</sup> that the events of the tale are all results of a decree of fate:

"We have a circle composed of the biography of the characters until their marriage and all that happens to them after it. The marriage is the centre of this circle. Those who are caught in the circle are all good, but are punished. The punishment is from decree, while the punished - from fate ... There is no sin in Dinah, whose thoughts are with the Ben-Uri when she is Yechezkel's wife, and there is no sin in Yechezkel,

whose thoughts are with Freidel though he is Dinah's husband. The sin is with those who are the cause for Yechezkel and Dinah being man and wife." <sup>4</sup>

Katznelson's statement, that "there is no sin in Dinah ... and there is no sin in Yechizkel..." despite thoughts of other than their respective spouses, is in disregard to sayings of our sages:

Thoughts of transgression are more severe than transgression. <sup>5</sup>

When a woman is alone with her husband and is with him and her thoughts are with another man whom she has seen beforehand - there is no adultery greater than that. <sup>6</sup>

It cannot be assumed that Agnon, too, disregarded these sayings of the sages.

If Katznelson's first assumption, that everything occurred by force of fate, is correct, why look for sinners? And if there are sins and sinners in the story, it would be incorrect to attribute events to decrees and fate. <sup>7</sup>

Arna Golan's interpretation of the tale <sup>8</sup> is more interesting, having to do with "crime and punishment". She sees the story as an allegory

"... which, eventually, deals with reality and is intended to express Agnon's attitude to the act of aliyah to Eretz Yisrael." <sup>9</sup>

By force of the assumption stated, she concludes that:

"It is now clear that Dinah symbolizes the Tribe of Dan, while Ben-Uri, in his symbolic capacity as Betzalel Ben-Uri son of Chur is from the tribe of Yehuda, and the Messiah is to be born of their match! But sin has caused the match not to materialize, and the Messiah does not come. Now the meaning of the story changes entirely, for it emerges that Dinah did not sin at all, and as for the dropping of the Ark - that was done with the assistance of a Divine Force." <sup>10</sup>

Agnon's critics have always interpreted stories by drawing conclusions from names of characters, but attributing importance to names to the extent of forcing the critics to state the opposite of what is distinctly stated in the text, is carrying this method of interpretation too far. A. Golan does it in the most central point of the story, the dropping of the Ark, which she attributes to divine power, thus being in disagreement with Agnon:

"She went to the Ark and looked at it. Satan came, and put envy in her heart. He pointed to the Ark and said, what do you suppose, who silenced Ben Uri's voice if not this cabinet? While he spoke to her, she pushed and touched the Ark. The Ark leaned over and fell through the open window." <sup>11</sup>

Agnon does not write of or in any way imply Divine interference. It is diffiant to conceive that an act which is the author's attribute to Satan, is attributed by an interpreter of that author to Divine Powers. A. Golan does all this close to her statement - warning:

"Each of Agnon's stories must be based on the world of connotations and associations arising from the linguistic and stylistic planes." <sup>12</sup>

She also accuses the bride's father of being the sinner, claiming that he was proud and selfish, doing all that he does for his own honour. <sup>13</sup>

This is in no way evident from the text.

Agnon finds Achiezer guilty on one count, and one count only - that he looked for a groom for his daughter abroad:

"Here Satan intervened, and not for nothing was it bruised about him, that R. Achiezer had slighted all the academies and yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael by sending to seek a groom for his daughter among the sons of exile abroad." <sup>14</sup>

However, Agnon does not return to this topic throughout the unravelling of the plot, possibly because despite the slighting of the young men of Jerusalem, R. Achiezer had succeeded in bringing to Jerusalem a "wonderous lad, clad in virtue, head and shoulders above the rest" <sup>15</sup>, to glorify Torah and its learning in Eretz Yisrael. He is therefore not debited with this, nor with anything else.

Both critics dealt with here agree that the story deals with "crime and punishment", though the importance they attribute to this motif varies. <sup>16</sup> Let us then ask: who sinned? how? what is the punishment? Does the severity of the punishment befit the sin?

The sins in this story are Dinah's who sinned a triple sin:

- i. Her attitude to Ben Uri.
- ii. Lack of willingness to struggle with her problem.
- iii. A result of the two sins mentioned.

#### 1. DINAH'S ATTITUDE TO BEN URI

Our text reveals that Dinah's previous visits to Ben Uri's workshop differed in their nature from her final visit on the fateful night, the night of the pushing of the Ark through the window. In her early visits "she and her handmaidens went down". <sup>17</sup> The visits took place during day time, with

the appropriate accompaniment. If at this stage there was any romantic attraction between Dinah and Ben Uri, there was no indication of any intention of carrying it further than attraction.

In contrast with the Dinah we meet at the beginning of the tale, who ... was worthy of all this respect .... but all this pride was inward ..." <sup>18</sup> on the fateful night

"At just that moment Dinah left her chamber.  
On her body - her night clothes, and on her  
face - fear." <sup>19</sup>

The visit would take place at night, alone with a single man. <sup>20</sup>

The reason for the fear on Dinah's face is obvious. This is no social visit, nor one deriving from curiosity. It derives from abysmal despair, and goes side by side with being reconciled with the risk involved "For many days she did not hear Ben Uri's voice, nor did she see him." <sup>21</sup> During those long days of longing, Dinah resolved to achieve in a prohibited way what she was unable to attain in a permitted way.

Luck - good or bad - would have it that Ben Uri was not in his room. Her intention is further emphasized by the phrase used to describe Ben Uri's room "where he fulfils his function". <sup>22</sup> This phrase is reminiscent of the phrase used concerning Joseph with Potifar's wife "And he came into the house to fulfil his function" <sup>23</sup>, which Rashi explains <sup>24</sup> "Rav and Shmuel, one says function proper, the other to function with her".

Moreover, Ben Uri gets his name from his being modelled like the Biblical Betzael Ben Uri. <sup>25</sup> We must therefore assume that Dinah's name and image also derive from her Biblical counterpart, whose infamy comes from an impure deed connecting her and

Shechem son of Chamor.<sup>26</sup> The text does not disguise her part and guilt in the difficulties which befell her: "and Dinah daughter of Leah, went out ...." In so doing, she sinned against the accepted morality which is implied in by the words of the Psalmist "The King's daughter is all glorious within"<sup>27</sup> Dinah is condemned in our Sages' sarcastic remark "It was for her lingering on outside that she is here related to Leah, for she too was a lingerer (Genesis 30, 16) and hence the parable "Like Mother like daughter"<sup>28</sup>

It must be noted that the midrashic chapter uses the phrase "and Dinah went out" eight times, and indirectly accuses Dinah of being the reason for the bloodshed in Shechem, and for all the troubles to Jacob and his sons as a result.

The Biblical Dinah is certainly not naive, and from that we can conclude about the Dinah in Agunot , she, too is neither naive nor innocent.

## 2. HER LACK OF WILLINGNESS TO STRUGGLE WITH HER PROBLEM

Not only does Dinah become involved with Ben Uri, but she does not have the courage to confess it to the Rabbi, and this is her second sin. On the day of her marriage, she is satisfied with "telling him of how it happened, that the Ark slipped and fell",<sup>29</sup> omitting the most important part. She is dragged along by the current of events, neither rebelling against the situation nor coming to terms with it. She entered the bridal canopy with R. Yechezkel without clarifying the truth to herself when she could have done so. Her main sin, therefore, is remaining entirely passive, and being unwilling to clarify the situation so as to change it.

### 3. THE RESULT OF THE TWO SINS MENTIONED

As a result, she married R. Yechezkel while her heart was with Ben Uri, and this, as we have seen, constitutes a grave offence.

Her husband, R. Yechezkel, is guilty of the same offences as Dinah, for he carries in his heart the memory of an old love, and on the strength of this memory he, too, is carried along by the stream of events, not attempting to influence them.

Part of the blame is with the Rabbi. When Dinah told him that she was responsible for the Ark's disappearance, it was up to him to investigate this further. He did not, and this negligence made the marriage possible, and caused Ben Uri untold and unjustified suffering. This explains Ben Uri's retort to the Rabbi. "Why did you drive me out, from gaining my part in the inheritance of God?"<sup>30</sup> The Rabbi, too, has sinned, though his sin was not in a deed but on the contrary - lack of it.

To sum up - in this story, and once again with the background of "Those good old Days" Agnon deals with Mankind's basic problem - the willingness, or lack of it, of man to struggle with himself and with his destiny. Here too, as in previous tales examined, Agnon does not idealize the past and is not prejudiced in its favour merely because it is far removed. He applies the same criteria to the past as he does to the present, criticizing where criticism is due.



# REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "AGUNOT"

1. Elu Ve'Elu p. 405 - 416
2. ibid. p. 405
3. G. Katznelson: Agunot Shel Agnon - Gilgulav Shel Nosach in Moznayim, Av-Elul 5728, p. 163 - 173
4. ibid. p. 164 - 165
5. Yoma 29,1
6. Bamidbar Raba 9, 43. See also Brachot 12, 2  
Shabbat 64, 1  
Baba Batra 164, 2  
Avoda Zara 20, 2  
Chulin 37, 2  
Nidda 13, 2  
Avot Derabbi Natan 20
7. Arna Golan (HaSipur Agunot VeHa-Aliya Hashniya in Moznayim, Shvat 5731, p. 216) negates this approach of Katznelson and writes "He, like others who did not perceive this (one of her theories - M.Y.H.), come to using unfitting terms like 'fate' ..." See the other misgivings she has about his approach.
8. ibid. p. 215 - 225
9. ibid. p. 215
10. ibid. p. 221
11. Elu Ve'Elu p. 408
12. Moznayim, Shvat 5731, p. 216
13. ibid. p. 219
14. Elu Ve'Elu p. 406
15. ibid.
16. On the subject of sin, or sin and retribution, in Agunot, see also: To "unite" the footnote:

S.Y. Pnueli, Yetzirato Shel Shai Agnon p. 20

H. Barzel, Bein Agnon LeKafka p. 191

17. Elu Ve'Elu p. 407

18. ibid. p. 406

19. ibid. p. 408

20. For the prohibition of privateness see:  
Kiddushim 80,2 and following  
Avoda Zara 36,2

On Agnon's attitude towards it, see D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon BeAl Peh, p. 18 - 19.

21. Elu Ve'Elu p. 408

22. ibid.

23. Genesis 39, 2

24. ibid. according to Sota, 36,2

25. See G. Shaked Omanut HaSipur Shel Shai Agnon p. 56

26. Genesis 34

27. Psalms 45, 14

28. Rashi to Genesis 34,1 according to Bereshit Rabah, 80,1

29. Elu Ve'Elu p. 411

30. ibid. p. 415

## TWO LEARNED MEN WHO WERE IN OUR TOWN <sup>1</sup>

The opening and closing sentences of this tale make it seem as though Agnon is in fact justifying the "Those good old Days" theory.

It opens with:

"Three or four generations ago, when the Torah was dear to Israel and all the splendour of a man was to be found in the Torah, our town was so privileged as to be considered among the most distinguished in the land, for it had learned men in it, and they weaved a thread of Grace around it with the Torah they learnt." <sup>2</sup>

and ends on a similar note:

"In this tale I did not intend to recount the praises of a model man, nor to tell of the jealousy of R. Moshe Pinchas, but I told the tale of two learned men who were in our town two or three generations ago, when the Torah was the splendour of Israel and all Israel went in Torah's ways." <sup>3</sup>

It is unusual that an author tells his readers what he intended to transmit when he was writing. Why does he not allow us to gather our impressions and reach our own conclusions concerning the quality of the story, its content and its characters? L. Goldberg has justifiably concended that the opening and closing sections point to the meaning hidden in the deeper levels of our tale:

"We had unsuspectingly assumed that the entire story revolves "around" the praises of a model man. - R. Shlomo, who made one mistake in his life and could not right the wrong during the remainder of his model life, and R. Moshe Pinchas fanaticism, which caused him bitter anguish, ruined his life and the lives of his family, and finally drove him to the grave.

This is how we read the tale and so we understood it and liked it. Then comes the author and guesses what is on our minds and says: You suppose that it is so? Well then, you are wrong, for my intention was completely different and I meant otherwise...

Now that which we had suspected is strengthened: perhaps the closing words are there not to point out the truth, but to camouflage something, or at least to hint at the possibility of interpreting things in two ways." <sup>4</sup>

Let us then see what it is that the author tried to hint at in his seemingly unnecessary remarks.

Agnon states that "all the splendour of a man was in the Torah." Does this pass the test of the story's reality? Was the Torah the only splendour? Was it a splendour at all?

It does not seem to be the case when we look at the life of the diligent eminent scholar, R. Moshe Pinshas, who learnt Shas and rabbinic literature continually:

"Moshe Pinchas was of impoverished stock. He was born in the village and grew up in the village. Most of the Torah which he knew he learnt by himself, and reached a high level in Torah by his own will; so the Holy One, Blessed be He rewarded him and the same Torah upon which he had blackened his eyes now smiled upon him and revealed her secrets to him. But despite his high level in Torah, he could not free himself from his poverty. The poor fellow's wisdom was compatible and he had to say "It is enough that I and my creator recognize my strength." <sup>5</sup>

The description of R. Moshe Pinchas mode of learning and its result query what is said in the chapter concerning the acquiring of Torah:

"This is Torah's way: You shall eat a loaf in salt and drink water stringently, you shall sleep on the earth and lead a life of suffering and labour with Torah. If you do so you are happy and benefitted - you are happy in this world, and will benefit in the world to come." <sup>6</sup>

R. Moshe Pinchas fulfilled all the conditions laid out in the chapter, yet we do not see that for which the conditions were laid down

being applied to him.

Agnon deliberately describes to us such study of Torah that is completely in keeping with the instructions of the chapter, and perhaps even transcends it:

"One day ... a man came to our new house of study and in his hand one large loaf of bread .... because he was so attracted by his learning, he stopped neither to drink tea nor to sleep when he learnt he sat like a peg which had been stuck into the ground, and stopped only to drink water from the basin ..."

Yet despite his diligence and devotion, R. Moshe Pinchas lived out his entire life in dire poverty, and Agnon leaves no doubt as to the fact that "you are happy in this world" was not fulfilled concerning R. Moshe Pinchas. Later on in the story, grave doubts are raised as to "will benefit in the world to come".

Try as we might, that thread of Grace which is supposedly wound around learned men by virtue of their Torah is not to be found round R. Moshe Pinchas.

There is no thread of Grace and there is no splendour.

The comparison between R. Moshe Pinchas and his colleague in the story, R. Shlomo, is deliberate. From the description of R. Shlomo it becomes clear to the readers that there are "splendours" other than Torah:

"The rich man's son-in-law, R. Shlomo HaLevi of Horwitz was from the family of Horwitz, and a descendent of the holy Shelah. Some said that for twenty six, and others that for thirty six generations Torah has not stopped in that family, and there was not one town in our country in which one of them did not occupy the seat of the rabbinate.

.... R. Shlomo fixed himself a place in the new house of study because the new house of study stands on a hill and its air is good, and he liked learning where the air is good .... His face, his blue eyes and his auburn hair made him liked by all who saw him .... short trousers folded into long socks and his shoes were soft and his cloak was wide and all his clothes were of silk in the manner of sons of rabbis who have the best of both worlds."<sup>8</sup>

The R. Shlomo sketched has worthy forefathers, is handsome, has beautiful clothes, and he lacks nothing, all his good qualities being added to his Torah. His Torah, too flourishes, his good qualities stand him in good stead and he becomes a great rabbi. Yet the question arises did he reach his high position by right of his Torah alone, or was he aided, directly or indirectly, by the fame of his lineage or by the wealth of his father-in-law? Indeed, the reader begins to suspect that not only does the story not describe a situation whereon "all the splendour of a man was to be found in his Torah", but it becomes clear that there is no "splendour" whatsoever in the learning of the Torah and in its diligent attainment.

Lest we err and think that R. Moshe Pinchas suffered the degradation of hunger all his life through chance, and in order that we do not think that by his revengeful and unforgiving nature he brought all his misfortunes upon himself, and the Torah was, in fact, the only true "splendour", Agnon adds one episode, to remove all doubt. The tale of the grumblers and their mischief making<sup>9</sup> serves this purpose. The addition of this tale seems to burden the flow of the plot, for the tale of the grumblers does not fit into the subject matter of the story. It has no bearing on the relationship between the two main characters, nor does it bear on what follows after it.<sup>10</sup>

If so, why is it in the story?

The description of the wide spectrum of grumblers, from the secular scholar to R. Fishel who demands the membership in the Beith Din (religious court) from the users to the leader of the Society for clothing the poor, comes to show that the splendour of the Torah, even Torah such as of R. Shlomo, was no splendour in the eyes of that generation that lived "three or four generations ago."

From all the above it becomes clear that Agnon's opening and closing words have a blurring and mystifying effect, rather than a clarifying and directing one.

Consequently, this story, classified by some critics as one of the prime examples of those belonging to "Those Good Old Days", does not come to describe a society in which everything is in order. Having revealed that "the splendour of Torah" is not the subject of the story, it must be asked what the real subject is.

R. Moshe Pinchas's path bewilders anyone who follows it. What motivates the bottomless hatred and blind obstinacy of this learned man? What force drives him to cause sorrow and suffering to all those close to him, and to bring shame and disgrace to a Jewish community?

Professor Ephraim Urbach sees his actions as the outcome of a decree. "Before R. Moshe Pinchas there is only one way - that in which it was decreed that he should go." <sup>12</sup>

He reaches this conclusion in an interesting way. In chapter 17 of the story, we are told that R. Moshe Pinchas went to visit "His first Rabbi, Our master, HaGaon R. Gavriel Rainush who wrote Horah Gaver on Yoreh Deah"<sup>13</sup> After R. Moshe Pinchas spent three days there, during which he hinted to the Rabbi that he had emotional and psychological problems, after three days in which they dealt in

"Sifra and Sifri and Mechilta and Tosefta and the entire Shais, and the house became as wide as the entrance to a hall, and there was not one thing which R. Moshe Pinchas could not complete by heart ...."

his Rabbi gave him a certificate ordaining him to be a Rabbi, " and said to him, here is an amulet against melancholy." <sup>14</sup>

Professor Urbach examines this section very acutely:

"But who is this Rabbi of his? He wrote Horah Gaver on Yoreh Deah. Such a paper on Yoreh Deah was never written, so it is an analogy. Job said "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said: (horah gaver) There is a manchild conceived." <sup>15</sup>

"R. Chanina son of Papa said: The angel in charge of pregnancy, Night is his name, takes a seed and places it before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and asks: Master of the universe, this seed, what will it be, strong or weak, wise or foolish, rich or poor. (Nidda 16,2) Night is the "angel who executes decrees". He decreed on Moshe Pinchas, and his decree is spread over Yoreh Deah <sup>16</sup>. The ordination which comes from this source entitles him to nothing, but complicates him further in that which was decreed upon him - to continue in his hatred for R. Shlomo." <sup>17</sup>

To simplify - from the fact that Agnon uses the phrase Horah Gaver, Professor Urbach logically concludes that our story and the Talmudic sections are connected. He further concludes that R. Moshe Pinchas must suffer and continue to do so, for so it was decreed upon him.



This discovery concerning the words Horah Gaver is commendable, but there is one flaw - in the section he quotes, Professor Urbach omits the most meaningful part. The gemarrah continues and concludes"

But the angel night does not decree whether he be righteous or wicked, and this is in accordance with R. Chanina, who said "Everything is in the hands of heaven except the fear of heaven."

In this context, the phrase Horah Gaver would take on a meaning diametrically opposed to the one given to it by Professor Urbach, and the way to understand the Agnonian text in this light would be as follows:

R. Moshe Pinchas, the impoverished scholar, goes to his Rabbi, who is so poor that he lies in bed though being in good health, because "I'm an old man, and not worthy of making new clothes, so I lie in bed in order that my clothes will not be worn away from sitting".<sup>18</sup> R. Moshe Pinchas who has an inferiority complex which feeds and strengthens his hatred, hopes to recover and pull himself together in the company of his Rabbi, whose fortune is so similar to his own. However, his being with the Rabbi and all the rabbi's attempts to encourage him are of no avail and do not ease his burden. Then the Rabbi points to the problem of Horah Gaver, the substance of which is "it was not decreed whether he be righteous or wicked." - nothing has been decreed upon you. Your fate is in your own hands, and it depends on you and on you only, therefore - struggle! "Here is an amulet against melancholy" - by force of your free will, you may overcome all obstacles in your way! The Rabbi has shown him the way open to all those who falter, the only way for them to leave their predicament - the way of struggle.

Did R. Moshe Pinchas obey his Rabbi? Did he go out and fight for his survival as a human being? The rest of the story tells us that he remained as he was. This is not a result of any decree, for nothing was decreed upon him. The blame for the failure rests with himself, and the story's theme is man's struggle - his struggle with himself, with his Yetzer Hara, with his drives.

It is a R. Moshe Pinchas disgraced by failure that we see. His answer to his old mother "I too do not understand it, but that is how it is and I do not know how to explain it" <sup>19</sup> is a painful admission of his shameful failure.

R. Shlomo, too, is punished for the sin of his early days, - for the slip of his tongue, for not paying heed to "wise men - be careful of your words", <sup>20</sup> and for so cruelly insulting the poor young man, his rival. The impoverished young man suffered all his life, having been at the mercy of others. In his childhood he had to be satisfied with the tutors of the sons of the rich men of the village, while in his youth he acquired Torah by himself, through sheer hard work, according to the rules set down in the chapter on acquiring Torah. When R. Shlomo came to the house of study, R. Moshe Pinchas sought his friendship. However, he was not welcome in R. Shlomo's house and was at most tolerated there: "and it was in her heart against Moshe Pinchas that he bothers her husband and excites the house with his voice .... R. Shlomo desired to appease her". <sup>21</sup> Moshe Pinchas had innocently assumed that Torah "can bridge the social gap between them, and R. Shlomo's insult came as a bitter disappointment to him, for the only thing he valued in his life, his Torah, was, in a way, removed from him, for it could not overcome a social difference. R. Shlomo, who was a scholar as well as being of great lineage, brushed aside

R. Moshe Pinchas, who was a scholar of no lineage.

R. Shlomo's punishment is, in effect, measure for measure. He of distinguished lineage, had insulted a non-entity, came others, sons of wardens, of distinguished lineage, and insulted him:

"The disagreement was yet only a disagreement when R. Fishel became a widower and married a woman from the Feibush family. This is the same Feibush family which was named after R. Uri Feibush the warden, who led the town forcefully, and all his descendants inherited his qualities and controlled the town."<sup>22</sup>

All these joined with all the other distinguished ones "and the grumblers" in their opposition and hindering of he who insulted a nameless son of a poor family. The same social order which exists in Moshe Pinchas's village when he was a child, reigns in R. Shlomo's community with his maturity, and it is the same social disorder which had humiliated Moshe Pinchas in the past which causes R. Shlomo unpleasantness and difficulties though he is occupying the rabbinical seat."<sup>23</sup>

In other words, all the anguish to the two learned men and their families was caused by

- 1) One of them being careless and failing with words.
- and
- 2) The other not making adequate attempts to overcome his Yetzer Hara and his drives.

What is Agnon's attitude to the two main characters in this story? Does he take a stand in this confrontation, more bitter than death, which is raging between the two learned men?

"Agnon is a learned man from a family which had many learned sons, and he favours the learned aristocracy."<sup>24</sup>

Socially, Agnon personally is close to R. Shlomo, one of the aristocrats. But this is not enough to prejudice Agnon in his favour. He feels for both men, and his loyalty is torn between them.

However, Agnon's heart is with R. Moshe Pinchas in the latter's suffering, humiliation and failure though Agnon and R. Shlomo have similar backgrounds, there is much which the author and R. Moshe Pinchas have in common. R. Moshe Pinchas tells his Rabbi "The Holy One, Blessed be He, does not look at the petty books"<sup>25</sup>, while Agnon feels that

"Only the study of a page of gemarrah is not a waste of time. Judaism is the Judaism of the Torah, to which gemarrah may be added, and that is all."<sup>26</sup>

The fact that Agnon resembles each of the two men in different points proves the ambivalence of his feelings towards them.

More interesting - despite the abyss of hate which separates the two men, they, too, have much in common. R. Shlomo's grandfather was R. Pinchas. The biblical Pinchas was zealous and revenging.<sup>27</sup> True, we have no details of old R. Pinchas's jealousy, but he was certainly pedantic and severe "He ordered that they should bury no one by him, until after a hundred years, and then it should be of his seed"<sup>28</sup> R. Shlomo is R. Pinchas's physical descendant, but his spiritual descendant is R. Moshe Pinchas, who has the same name.

Moreover, when R. Shlomo took ill, the name added to him to ensure life is Moshe.<sup>29</sup> R. Moshe Pinchas marries a woman named Sheindil,<sup>30</sup> while R. Shlomo sets up a marriage contract with the Sheiner<sup>31</sup> family. The names mean the same. Anyone

familiar with the importance of names in Agnon will recognize that this is no coincidence.

From all the above it would seem that Agnon does not take a personal stand in this story, nor does he favour one side, and for this reason he ends his story with:

In this tale I did not intend to recount the praises  
of a model man, nor to tell of the jealousy of  
R. Moshe Pinchas ....<sup>32</sup>

In this tale there is no black or white, no guilty or innocent.

Both men erred, and both suffered as a result.<sup>33</sup> The story ends on a very pessimistic note, the pessimism arising from a strong disappointment at the failure of the two learned men.

As though the author is saying "if that is how things were two or three generations ago, when, according to the reader's understanding, the Torah was the splendour of the Jews, what is to be expected of the present?"

There is not, nor was there a time when everything was in order. A period like that can be expected only, to quote the last words of the story,

When we will be privileged to hear Gods Torah  
from the mouth of our righteous Messiah, when  
he will sit and learn Torah will all of Israel,  
who learned Torah from love.<sup>34</sup>

# REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "TWO LEARNED MEN WHO WERE IN OUR TOWN"

1. Samuch VeNireh p. 5-53
2. ibid. p. 5
3. ibid. p. 53
4. L. Goldberg: Shai Agnon HaSofer Vegiboro in LeAgnon Shai p. 48 - 49
5. S. Bialoblotzky: Baalei Teshuva BeSipurei Agnon, in Yuval Shai p. 127
6. Ethics of the Fathers, 6, 4
7. Samuch VeNireh p. 5 - 8
8. ibid. p. 8 - 9
9. ibid. p. 38-40
10. The people of Shebosh in fact try to convince R. Shlomo to leave the strife torn community and join their town, but he rejects their offer.
11. S.Y. Bialoblotzky sees the theme as being a clash of social classes: "This hatred is the revolt of the common learned men against his aristocratic counterpart" (Baali Teshuva BeSipurei Agnon, in Yuval Shai, p. 127). Indeed, there is no doubt that this clash serves as a background for the story. Immediately after his first appearance in the house of study, R. Moshe Pinchas succinctly expresses his opinion on this matter: "They said to him, that is my place and that is my gemarra, he answered them, the Torah is no birthright" (Samuch Venireh p. 6). In Moshe Pinchas's eyes, the Torah is the sole authority, and any other authority does not apply to him. Lineage or any other such qualities have no value in his eyes, and it is this approach which guides him throughout.
12. E.A. Urbach, Shnei Talmidei Chachamim Shehayu Be-Ireinu - MeKorot Ufeirush, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 16.
13. Samuch VeNireh, p. 24 - 25

14.    ibid.
15.    Job, 3, 3
16.    The halachic work knowledge of which is required for the attainment of rabbinical ordination.
17.    E.A. Urbach, Shnei Talmidei Chachamin SheHayu Be-Ireinu - MeKorot Ufeirush, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 16.
18.    Samuch VeNireh p. 24
19.    ibid. p. 23
20.    Avot, 1, 11 , Avot deRabbi Nathan 1, 1
21.    Samuch VeNireh p. 10
22.    ibid. p. 39
23.    "Measure for measure" appears in yet another context in this story. In the dramatic confrontation between the two learned men, R. Shlomo behaves with great self control. However, he does accuse R. Moshe Pinchas of misinterpreting the Torah." and all this because of him who was seen travelling on the second day of the Holy Day in a wagon which moves by steam ... and when they rebuked him he did not say 'I was forced' but he wanted to prove that travelling in such a wagon was permitted even on the Sabbath" (ibid. p. 38). Here R. Shlomo had an opportunity to learn the real meaning of "misinterpreting the Torah" and of "a sharp man may do much with his sharpness".
24.    S.Y. Bialoblotzky: Baalei TeShuva BeSipurei Agnon, in Yuval Shai p. 124.
25.    Samuch VeNireh p. 25
26.    D. Kna'ani Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 96
27.    See Numbers 25, 7 - 13
28.    Samuch VeNireh p. 8, 33
29.    ibid. p. 51

30.    ibid, p. 27
31.    ibid. p. 8
32.    ibid. p. 53
33.    Y. Keshet, in Pirkei Agnon Havdalot, p. 107 sees  
R. Shlomo as being all good and condemns R. Moshe  
Pinchas for being "the zealous angry man, who  
keeps grudges, ..revenges and is as hard as a cedar..."
34.    Samuch VeNireh p. 53



## SUMMARY

In the preceeding chapters we dealt with the majority of those of Agnon's stories which are set in the past. It has emerged that the subject of man's struggle passes through all these stories, and our theory is that Agnon did not choose this as the common denominator accidentally. This fact will guide us in the continued examination of his work, in which we will once again seek this theme.

It is worth noting that Agnon indicates the presence of a deeper level in the last words of his stories. This technique was seen clearly in:

Bilvav Yamim

Hanidach

Two learned men who were in out Town

VeHaya HeAkov LeMishor

and less clearly in

Agunot

We may assume that the repitition of this technique comes to indicate the unity of these stories.

## THE COMMUNITY

In the previous chapters, we dealt with the subject of human struggles in Agnon on an individual plane, and it emerged that his opinion is that neither change of place nor change of time lessen the need for struggle.

In the following chapters, we will see struggle on a social plane. We will examine his attitude to the institution of lay leadership, and to lay leaders. We will also touch upon his description of a forming of a lay leader, and a society's part in his rise.

CHAPTER SIX

WARDENS AND WARDENSHIP

## WARDENS AND WARDENSHIP

".... when our forefathers were in Egypt and they were six hundred thousand, the Holy One, Blessed be he, gave them Moshe our master, peace be upon him, for a leader, and now that we are more than six hundred thousand, heaven forbid that He has left us without a leader, and it is certain that now too we have a leader, only that leader is hidden and is not revealed to his own generation." <sup>1</sup>

Agnon seems to be searching for a leader - the subject of leadership appears in many of his books and tales. He groups together the leaders, the Wardens of his generation, and the Wardens of past generations, with whom he is dissatisfied. He does not save them from the barbs of his tongue and from the arrows of his mocking. Never tired of condemning their will to rise and their lust for power, he scorns those men of standing who disregard their communities and place themselves above them.

This attitude is apparent throughout his work, from "The Bridal Canopy" through "Tmol Shilsom" to "Shira". We have already dealt with Agnon's feelings towards R. Yisrael Shlomo, the warden, and concluded that in the past, even before the time of R. Yudil Crassid, a warden might have been corrupt. <sup>2</sup> Agnon is consistent in his outlook, not favouring the past over the present, but treats each case independently, as is due. The only distinction he makes is between the guiltless and the guilty.

Now will follow several examples, collected from Agnon's writing, of his expressions on the subject of lay leaders. Some of these expressions are direct, others are indirect, but all offer severe criticism of those who use their public status to pursue their personal ends and satisfy their selfish needs.

".... Netta was transferring wheat and barley to the town and bringing assorted goods to the village, and he was eating and drinking and enjoying himself and he fed Pull Me and Let Us Run"(his horses - M.Y.H.) oats without any straw mixed into it, until they became as fat as two wardens of a charitable organization." <sup>3</sup>

Being compared to two fat horses is not at all flattering to the wardens.

In "From the Wrath of the Oppressor", the old man tells the young scholar:

"I am seventy years of age, and have never been privileged enough to see a warden doing good with a poor man for Heaven's name." <sup>4</sup>

In VeHaya HeAkov LeMishor, when Kreindil Tshorney is under the impression that she has been widowed, her fellow villagers go to the warden to ask for aid for her

"They said to him, Kreindel Tshorney is dying of hunger. He said, indeed, indeed, Kreindil Tshorney is dying of hunger. They repeated and said, Kreindil Tshorney is dying of hunger, she is actually dying of hunger. So he said: you simpletons jumping around thinking that we have ignored her. So they asked, what shall we do? And he said, it has been done, namely, they had agreed to give her a gift."

They procrastinate, and Kreindil Tshorney is saved only by her marriage.

"... This town has a rich man and the rich man has a son-in-law and the son-in-law is ordained as a Rabbi.... The rich man decided to make him head of the rabbinical court .... as the saying goes: "The crocodile produced offspring and forced the townspeople to feed them" What does he do? He goes to the mayor and bribes him with money. So the mayor hinted that

the selection for army will be soon, and they had better do as he wishes, for if not - the whole town will be taken into the army! .... This rich man has a brother-in-law, and he too is not poor. They hate each other and are enemies .... and he too is friendly with the high ranking officials of the gentiles. So he went to the governor, and the governor ordered to seal the ritual bath."

The rich men's quarrel is based on hatred between them, and they suite one another at the expense of the public, which has no interest in their personal relations. They do not stop short of involving the gentile government in their squabbles, nor do they stop short of threatening to send all the Jewish men to the army, or of hurting the community in a matter so sensitive as the ritual bath.

The gabbai (lay officer at synagogue), in Yas, called all the Nilbavim to the Torah is the same

"Yoshki Cossak who sold himself to the King's army for a hatful of silver .... they said, his actions have not proved that a place in paradise is awaiting him." <sup>7</sup>

".... There is a tale of a few Jewish families which were expelled from Romania and they came to Stantslaw, and the warden of the community did not allow them to enter the town lest they trouble him, and they and their wives and their tender children rolled in the garbage outside their town, and their cries reached the heart of heaven." <sup>8</sup>

".... Sebastian Montag, chief citizen, who sold his soul for a mess of pottage ... All the money which came his way he wastes on drink and Nebbechlech (Yiddish for 'pathetic ones'). Nebbechlech is a name of affection and pity which Sebastian uses for the young girls who serve him." <sup>9</sup>

The same Sebastian Montag is asked to intervene for the release of Alexander, the Russian boy who was the only one to resist during a pogrom. Throughout a whole chapter we are told how the chief citizen was eating and drinking at other's expense, using obscene language, praising himself and telling lies - and he missed not one tavern, while Alexander was in prison, bound in iron chains, and the chief citizen was the one who could save him. 10

The mention of the burning of the community book, in which were records of three centuries or more, is done with sarcasm:

"The burning of that book was a bad business. It is not as everyone says, that Warden X., burnt it, because he found it in bad things about his family, rather, his son who is a learned man, was flustered and rushed, and he burnt it .... once on the eve of Passover, when burning the remainder of the leavan, he got rid of all the old papers of which he had no need and erred and burnt the old book with them." 11

Agnon is full of disgust towards the askanim (public workers implications of self interest and insincerity). One who is not yet an askan, but intends to be one, is considered as askan:

"On the way a young man clung to me and surrounded me with words, until half the day had passed and the time had come for the midday meal .... I asked him, when are you ascending to the land? He answered saying, as yet, there is much to be done here. - What is that here which is much? He opened his case and said, would you care to see? Promptly he showed me 365 memoranda and 248 booklets and 613 brochures and 999 pamphlets, and other assorted newspapers and periodicals ..." 12

The leaders of Zionism, when Yitzchak visits when they are sitting in a cafe in Lemberg, are described repulsively:

"Fat thick people ... in their hands assorted cues with which they push little balls along ... they were astonished that he was going to Palestine. One who is a Zionist and has money travels to conferences, if he has a lot he goes to the Congress .... and, if need be, one goes to a meeting or to a ball or to give a speech...." 13

So much for askanim in the diaspora. The askanim in Israel are no better, and here again Agnon is consistent, criticizing the wardens of the Yishuv Yashan (old fashioned communities in Jerusalem) who were responsible for distributing money collected abroad, and treated public money as their own.

".... The poor are robbed and widows are exploited and orphans are enslaved and those dealt with unjustly raise their heads, but there is none to tell them what to do .... there is no need to say that the actions of the Kolel 14 are usually not in order, for he who has much is given extra, while he who has nothing is not even given the little due to him." 15

More on the wardens of Jerusalem:

"... R. Naphtali Chaim knew the secrets of the soul of each and every trustee, and all their incarnations. When he walked in the market and saw carriers leading donkeys with skins of water on them, and they were prodding the donkeys with nailed sticks until their blood oozed, he called each donkey by name of one of the more famous trustees, who had died and were reincarnated as donkeys .... Once a man came to R. Naphtali Chaim to ask for an amulet for his son who had gone mad, mercy upon him .... and he did not leave R. Naphtali Chaim until he forced him to write an amulet. He hung it around his son's neck and he became sane.



His neighbours wished to see which names can drive out folly and so they opened the amulet. Inside they found written Nissim Beck, Elazar Shapira, two trustees who were in Jerusalem. They came to R. Naphtali Chaim and asked him to explain, so he said, even demons are afraid of those people." 16

The trustee in charge of the distribution in the Hungarian Koytel hurt Rivkah after the tragedy which befell Feish, her husband:

"The day Shifra's mother went to collect her share and she heard harsh words from the trustee on account of her daughter and because of that young man whom she pestered .... from the time that she lost her share in the distribution, she goes from door to door, trying to sell coffee." 17

When it comes to trustees, askanim and wardens, the old settlement and the new settlement are no different, All are condemned:

"The three Askanim (Aşkanowitz, Askansky and Askanson) became bored. Each was searching his mind for something with which to occupy his fellows, but they had not put words together before the will stopped and the face slackened and idiotic sadness caused their mouths to drop. This is the sadness of people whose deeds and thoughts have neither root nor fruit." 18

".... close to Jaffa, Tzvi jumped into the sea, because the authorities did not give him a certificate of permit to enter the land.... He was hit by rocks, whose heart is of stone, until he bled. When he escaped from them, he was surrounded by the authorities who caught him and brought him to their hospital to recover, and then they will send him abroad .... I went to men of standing to ask for mercy for Tzvi. As the rocks

which hit him did not soften, so did the hearts of those men of standing not soften. Having seen that there would be no help from them, I went to men of authority. Seeing that there is no help from them, I went to the leaders of the generation. Having seen that there is no help there, I went to the wardens of the community, ... and seeing that they would not help, I relied on our heavenly father." 19

Agnon classes all the lay communal leaders together, and finds all leaders, irrespective of approach, level or standing, guilty. This comes from disappointment and despair. The recurring phrase "there is no help from them" echoes as an expression of no confidence in the leaders, from men of standing through the leaders of the generation to the communities wardens. All as one are of no use and no goodness. Boasting in their status and positions for the sake of gaining honour and titles, they have no time for the "petty" matter of Tzvi whose aliyah was from belief and dedication, and who is now in the hands of the authorities, and about to be driven away.

This tale classes the lay leaders in Israel with their counterparts in the Diaspora and a prime example of whom is the corrupt Sebastian Montag. He too shuts his ears and heart to the plight of a young Jewish man helpless in a gentile prison.

Moreover, we are told, bitinglly, that "the newspapers used to hide the important items of news, and offer the unimportant ones .... as of that man who journeyed to Haifa or the Valley .... it informs me that that askan has returned from Haifa or the Valley." 20

To prove his point further, we have Agnon's Haprakim Shel Sefer Hamedinah,<sup>21</sup> in which his barbs are directed at characters like

Lipman Shreiholtz and his friends, the country's leaders and its great men the members of Bet Siftotayim (house of lip service - parliament) and its leaders. The text leaves no doubts as to Agnon's feelings towards all these. A similar attitude is obvious in, in the shadowy world of A Book of Deeds:

"Once he began talking he spoke of things which were not new, such as the town's worthies, who do not trouble with the public nor bear its burden, but use it as a garland with which to decorate themselves." 22

In the story Hamalbush (the garment) appears the idea that fear of a servant of the minister is greater than the fear of the minister:

"Even a small servant of the minister, I fear him more than I fear the Holy One, Blessed be He. It seems that the greater he is the less he is feared. I saw it myself yesterday - I feared the minister's servants more than I feared the minister himself." 23

The servants of the minister are none other than the lay leaders:

"In a private conversation with Agnon, I touched on Hamalbush, and mentioned what is said there about the minister, that his mercy is bountiful, and about his servants, who work in his service yet do their work in anger. Agnon sprang to life and said with sorrow, sorrow of one with tragic faith. And is it not so? Is that not the whole truth?" 24

We have presented many quotations from the work of Agnon, to show his attitude to wardens. What was collected here, however, is merely a sample, for evidence of his approach which is scattered amply throughout his works. The reader, following Agnon's description of the wardens, their characters and the way they relate to their respective communities, wholly agrees with his negative attitude towards them.

It must be asked: Does Agnon's attitude towards wardens reflect his attitude towards wardenship? By opposing one, does he oppose the other? Does he oppose governmental structures?

At first it must seem that the answer is in the affirmative:

"Generally, on principle, I would like to see a world without political government, without rich and poor, governing and governed. I am in favour of complete equality, allowing, however, for differences in talent." <sup>25</sup>

"Government corrupts. It should be a means for attainment, and should control objects, not people." <sup>26</sup>

However, it is not so simple as it seems. Agnon himself is a descendant of a family of wardens and men of standing. There is evidence in this work that he does not pass negative judgement on his family because of this, but on the contrary, he is proud of his ancestry.

He appreciates and admires his grandfather the warden:

"My grandfather was warden for forty years but he retired eventually, because he wanted to complete the Shas for the forty second time, and so fulfil the mitzvah of "and you shall speak of them." <sup>27</sup>

The description of R. Yoshi Rivlin is like a ray of light among the gloom of other lay leaders:

"The old people in Jerusalem still remember R. Yoshi Rivlin. For twenty five years he was a scribe and a trustee. During the day he would labour for the poor and at night he would labour with Torah. Throughout his days he saw no good, but carried his burden with a good heart

and a humble spirit. All the wealth which came to Jerusalem was distributed by him, but he himself did not eat meat and did not drink wine, not even of Shabbatot and Holy Days, but was satisfied with black bread and black coffee. When he died, he did not leave his widow and orphans with food for even one meal, but he left eleven new suburbs which he had added to Jerusalem." <sup>28</sup>

We have seen <sup>29</sup> Agnon's ambivalent feelings towards R. Avigdor the warden. He appreciates him and sits down to dine at his table, yet disguises himself to do so. Esteem and criticism go hand in hand.

This approach of Agnon to R. Avigdor may be taken as a guideline for his total approach to wardenship.

It is as though Agnon is saying that he is not negating all trustees, and finds fault with them not because they are trustees, but because of their flawed personalities. In cases where a trustee can be praised, he seems to be saying, he does not avoid doing it, but these cases are rare, and each one unique.

Agnon's approach to wardenship is best summarized by Professor E. Urbach's reference, in connection with "Two Learned Men who were in our town", to the letter which R. Chaim of Tzanz wrote to his son, R. Yechezkel of Shinyevch:

"My Beloved Son, I will tell you of one rule, and do not deviate from it .... whoever is appointed to this business (lay leadership, M.Y.H.), the words of Ba-al HaTurim "no man becomes an officer on earth unless he becomes a villain in Heaven"

are fulfilled in him . . . . witness the rich men  
 who become involved for the public good . . . .  
 and they make laws, in Heaven's name, until  
 they rob and exploit the poor and skin them  
 and are not ashamed, for they say, it is all  
 for Heaven's name and for the general good . . .  
 all that which I wrote is truth . . . . in this evil  
 world, the leaders are not just . . . . they know  
 well what is good for the townspeople, yet make  
 laws of Sodom and all for Heaven's name." <sup>31</sup>

In positing this approach, Agnon follows Maimonides who stated  
 that "once a person is appointed a warden of the public on earth,  
 he becomes a villain in heaven." <sup>32</sup>

A further indication of Agnon's strong reservations concerning lay  
 leadership is to be found in "The Song of the Letters" <sup>33</sup> and in this  
 case conclusions are reached not from the included but from the  
 omitted.

The twenty two sons each learnt a trade or a skill Jewish or  
 secular. In the long list of pursuits, we find not one young man  
 who pursued administration, policy making or leadership. Upon  
 arrival in Eretz Yisrael, they occupied themselves in many ways,  
 but none became a warden. Tochner has proved <sup>34</sup> that in  
 "The Song of the Letters", Agnon expresses his personal view.  
 The twenty two sons, whom he cultivates so carefully, do not occupy  
 themselves with anything he finds distasteful.

Agnon's attitude towards lay leaders did not change towards the end  
 of his days and in one of his most recent works, published after  
 his death, Henrietta Herbst says "woe upon us from the managers,  
 and woe upon us for their promises." <sup>35</sup> This is his approach  
 throughout. <sup>36</sup>

What is the reason for this wrath of Agnon's towards the wardens?

It seems, in the light of the suggestion in this work, that Agnon rejects them for the same reason as he rejects all others who do not overcome their drives. Their lust for power and honour goes to their heads, and causes two evils. The first evil is done to the men of power themselves, who fail in that they do not fulfill their function, and worse than that is the evil done to the community, who is at their mercy and therefore suffers. Agnon is not prepared to forgive or excuse this suffering, and hence his wrath.

REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "WARDENS AND WARDENSHIP"

1. Shalosh Shevuot, in HaEsh VeHaetzim p. 102
2. See above p. 49  
  
That, and other examples brought in this chapter, disagree with A. Ben-Ezer: "Agnon was not fond of the shepherds though in everything published during his life time he was at great pains to hide this dislike."  
HaZe Evim VeHakvasim, in Moznayim, Adar A. 5733, p. 176
3. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 41
4. ibid. p. 136
5. Elu Ve'Elu p. 115-116
6. ibid. p. 151
7. ibid. p. 506
8. Al Kapot Hamanul p. 124
9. ibid. p. 132 - 133
10. ibid. p. 321-326 Sebastian Montag is a very real character. "That Jewish mayor (whome Agnon calls "chief citizen") of Buczacz excelled himself not only in obscene language and in eating and drinking excessively at the expense of Oberschinkel, the resturanteur, but he was also an ingenius inventor of election forgeries." A.Y. Brawer, Bine-ureinu Uvizkeneinu bemisgeret Chayei mechabro, in Yuval Shai p. 42
11. "A Guest for the Night" p. 164
12. ibid. p. 317-318

For observant Jews, the numbers 613, 365 and 248 are associated with categories of mitzvot.



13. Tmol Shilshom p. 15 - 16
14. A system whereby members of a community abroad collecting money for people originating from the same community, now living in Eretz Yisrael, to be distributed justly.
15. Tmol Shilshom p. 304
16. ibid. p. 487 - 488
17. ibid. p. 511
18. ibid. p. 369
19. ibid. p. 437 - 438
20. "A Guest for the Night", p. 100
21. Samuch VeNireh, p. 250-287 (chapters from the Book of the State).
22. Ha Otobus Ha-Acharon, in Samuch VeNireh, p. 108
23. Ad Henah, p. 314
24. A. Zeitlin Al Omanuto Shel Agnon ve-al Emunato, in Moznayim, Av 5723, p. 164-165
25. D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 43
26. ibid. p. 50
27. Al Kapot Haman-ul, Bine-a'reinu Uvizekineinu, p. 321  
See also: Elu Ve'Elu p. 216, 220  
HaEsh VeHa-Etzim p. 23
28. Tmol Shilshom p. 231
29. See above p. 89
30. See Numbers, 1, 50
31. Quoted in: Shnei Talmidei Chachamim Shehayu Be-Ireinu, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 20

32. Maimonides' interpretation of Mishnah to Avot 1, 10.

For the influence of Maimonides' philosophy on Agnon  
See below p. 211-213.

33. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 418 - 467

34. Pesher Agnon, p. 50-61

35. Shirah p. 354

36. Gentile leaders are not exempt from Agnon's criticism. This is not the place to deal with their behaviour towards the Jews, and Agnon's feelings towards it. Rather, here is an example of the relations between gentile ruler and ruled: "The majority of the pillagers were men of standing and mercy, and would aid a poor man in time of need and they believed in the Creator of the world and when they take an oath in the name of the Eternal, even when they are threatened with death, they will not retract it. At first, they were not pillagers, but the ministers who ruled them forced them to leave their fields and take up pillaging (Elu Ve'Elu p. 486)

CHAPTER SEVEN

UPON THE DEATH OF THE TZADIK  
OR  
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

# "UPON THE DEATH OF THE TZADIK"

OR

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Within this very short story, Agnon describes a particular social phenomena, and whilst describing it he reveals the reason for its existence. Because he feels it to be negative, he condemns those responsible for it, and in so doing he presents a struggle which is entirely negative.

The story tells of a Tzadik who died, and "the whole country assembled to mourn him". There is a description of seven circles of people, surrounding the coffin in an organized and appropriate manner.

At the centre of the circles - the coffin. The Tzadik, even after his death, is a central point of society, and those standing in the circles gravitate towards him. Whoever stands closer to the Tzadik has a stronger relationship with him, but the righteous man's influence reaches even the seventh circle, thus unifying all social strata.

By what authority and by right of which forces does the Tzadik unite the populace around him?

"And they placed in it (the coffin - M.Y.H.) books which that genius had written, and they surrounded him with seven circles."

His authority, both in life and in death, comes to him from the Torah which he learnt, taught and wrote during his lifetime.

This is an example of authority without any coercion - he is freely accepted by all.<sup>2</sup> We witness also organization and order in the society, for each one knows his place.<sup>3</sup>

Those standing in the first circle are "wardens and leaders, commanders and counts,<sup>4</sup> rabbis and judges" with the Jewish great men stand "ministers of the kingdom" - influential gentile persons.

And so on, each circle representing a different group, until all of society is represented. But

"there was one man there who stood outside of all the rows, because he came at the end, because at first he had not intended to go there, because those who fear God and place importance with Him were as nothing to him, but when he saw that everyone hurried there, he went too."

This is a man who disregards those values which are most sacred to the society in which he lives, and lacks any positive motivation for a normal social existence. He also disdains the basic mitzvah of accompanying the dead on their last journey.<sup>5</sup> This mitzvah applies to the funeral of any dead man, irrespective of whether he is a Tzadik. Yet he intended to be absent from the funeral, because "those who fear God and place importance with Him were as nothing to him". Applied in the context of the story, this scorn

has a double meaning:

1. The deceased Tzadik was unimportant to him.
2. Those at the funeral were of no value to him.

He has no interest in the mitzvah of the funeral, nor in the God fearing.

Yet he goes.

Why?

"When he saw that everyone hurried there, he went too".

At this stage we are not told whether the motivation is positive or negative. It could be positive for he might have wanted to join society, having been attracted by the unity of the organized group. It could be negative, for the fear of remaining alone, without a framework might be the motivating factor. It could however, be a different motive.

After he "pushed and entered the seventh circle", he is not satisfied - he grumbles that he does not hear the eulogists well enough:

"If I would reach the sixth row I would hear all that the eulogist is saying, and my heart might awaken to repentance."

Is he sincere? Can we believe that he does not hear the eulogist because "each one absorbs the words first and leaves me nothing"? Does the "encroacher" (so Agnon calls him, and that is how he will be referred to here) believe that if he moves forward by one row, he will hear so much more? We do not see the encroacher thinking of repentance after he progresses.

In fact, a further characteristic of the encroacher is given here - he blames his fellows for his shortcoming. It is because of them that he is incapable of thinking about repentance. As soon as he has grounded his accusation of the others, this accusation serves as a justification and a lever for further anti-social behaviour and so "he spread his arms and pushed those in front of him until he entered the sixth circle".

When he enters the sixth circle, it is up to him to decide whether to evaluate his new status objectively or subjectively. He had wanted to hear the eulogist and "from here, everything the eulogist says can be heard", so apparently he attained his goal. But he evaluates his place, position and status subjectively, and because "in any case there is a better place than this, and which one is it? That which is in front of me" he must need to see himself as being discriminated against even when he has advanced by one stage. <sup>6</sup>

"He spread his arms and pushed and found himself standing in the fifth circle". Note - he "found himself", that is to say, he got there without any difficulty, and there was no barrier to prevent his "advance". This is not surprising. Those standing in the seventh, sixth and fifth circles had come to pay their respects to the deceased, but in these circles stood "the rest of the people, who occupied places according to the order of their arrival", and so they were not a cohesive unit within overall society. They are united in purpose, having come there for one reason, but otherwise their ranks are open to any ambitious

person who desires to force himself in.

The ambitious man who reached the fifth row, attaining social status with relative ease, is not satisfied with this achievement but is motivated by the idea that "one who has a hundred, desires two hundred", <sup>7</sup> and he says to himself:

"Shame on the man who has pushed himself so far, and pushes himself no further".

Here, he is taken aback. The position in the fourth row is different from the position in the three external circles. The fourth circle houses the disciples of the deceased Tzadik. They form a unified group, aware of its identity, and they stand firm and close. "That line was full with the late rabbi's pupils, who stood very close by each other". To join their ranks, one needs certain qualities, which the encroacher does not, and is not likely to possess. If so, his progress in a natural way is halted, and "that man was about to despair". But, that which he could not obtain in the ordinary manner, came to him "miraculously"

"A miracle <sup>8</sup> happened to him and one disciple fainted. They took him out of the line, and he entered in his place."

And so he obtains without effort by adopting the abandoned place.

Upon approaching the third row, he changes his mode of argument. Until now, he complained against the place. Now it is the people who are the butt of his dissatisfaction. In order to reach the conclusions which will favour him, he fixes a criterion by which he judges his fellows, completely disregarding status which society bestows upon those members she sees as meriting it:



"If the importance is given by others then I might say they are nothing to me ..... he started winding himself among them and was found standing with them."

"Others", that is the entire public, are as nothing in his eyes.

Having reached the third row "that man stood with all the honoured people and saw them as neither honoured nor important". He scorns them, and through that he moves to the next, the second circle.

It is important to note that the encroacher, who has no respect for the gathered crowd or its leaders, does not in any way hurt those standing in two lines - the second and the fourth.

He enters the fourth row and leaves it again without one unpleasant word about its occupants, the Tzadik's disciples. He enters it by force of momentum and leaves it out of scorn for those of the third row: "who are those that they should stand before me, and not I before them".

The same is true of the second row. He got there because he no longer wanted to be in the third row: "said that man to himself, who are they that they should stand in the same row with me. I will leave them and will enter the row in front of it". He leaves the second row for reasons outside of it and not because of it.

"Once he stood there his heart became resentful of the commanders and counts who stand before him, and their stature blocks out the light ....."

The fourth row houses disciples of the Tzadik, while in the second row stand learned men who have no official status, but everyone respects them and desires their honour." The encroacher does not hurt these two groups of people.<sup>10</sup>

This is unusual, and we will return to it.

When standing in the second row, he claims that:

"and they do not enable him to see the great ministers who have come to honour the dead."

He resents the Jewish leaders, for preventing him from seeing the Gentile leaders!

He wishes to know and tell of their garments and medals. The symbolism of "garment" is clear - he has no interest in the essence of things, but only in the shell and outer aspects - his desire to know of the garments is due to the fact that one day "he will be able to contradict it and say, such and such garments it was that they wore, and they were adorned by such and such medals."

He is all negation. One transgression leads to another, and having spoken against men, he next speaks out against God.:

"Master of the Universe, of all those who stand here, have you found none to humiliate, but me?"

These words bring him to the first circle.

Apparently, he has now achieved his aim. He stands, successful, among the great men of the world. Is he satisfied? Does he enjoy his achievement? Most important, does he genuinely believe that he has progressed?

No. Not at all.

"He began to look at those who stood near him. He measured the stature of each one of them, and measured himself with them."

This is precisely what he did when standing in the third line. It is easy to measure "stature" when the criterion is external - honour or seeming honour:

"When he saw himself in the first row he became proud. He began speaking to himself respectfully, in the honourable plural."

The social rites involved in social progress are learnt quickly. It now seems that the encroacher is one of the upper class, whose place is with the counts and wardens, men of equal stature to him.

But the truth bothers him. In the depth of his consciousness he knows that although he has misled the entire society, in spite of the fact that he pretended and acted adequately during his "rise", and even though he has reached the status of a warden, commander or count, he did not succeed in two of the rows - in the second, among learned men, and in the fourth, in the company of the Tzadik's disciples. Torah is not bought by hypocrisy. A man may reach the highest social status if he "plays his cards"

correctly, but nothing dishonest can make him learned.  
his ignorance pains him, and deep inside, he is not tranquil  
because of it.

His desire for honour, which has grown with the arrival at  
each new level and is now nourished by standing at the height  
of the social scale, together with an awareness of his ignorance,  
drives him out of his mind:

".... and he peeked ... at the coffin ... and  
saw that it was standing in the centre and the  
great men of Israel surrounded it in a respect-  
ful manner .... he became envious .... for if  
it is because of the Torah which he learnt and  
taught ... why, he was paid for it in his lifetime."

In saying this, the encroacher proves that he has adopted the  
values of a warden - belittling the learned rabbi, disregarding  
his learning, as it was exchanged, in his view, for money.

Now that the Tzadik is dead, he envies him that

" this one is lying in his coffin and the sun  
does not burn over his head, nor does  
anyone push him."

It is his tranquility which he desires. Will he attain that too?

Before that question is answered, Agnon returns to the dead Tzadik.  
This is not the place to deal with his thoughts, so let us look  
instead at the contact, which forms between the dead man and the  
encroacher. But first, it must be noted, that no contact is formed  
between the encroacher and those standing around him.

No one notices him, no one speaks to him and no one tries to stop him. There is no social contact between him, who stands outside society, the "outsider", and the society at whose expense he progresses. The only one who notices him is the deceased Tzadik.

"... he saw that man who pushed himself from row to row. Said the Tzadik, that means that there is one man present who enjoys what is being said."

The Tzadik, too, is no ordinary member of society. He stands above it. During his lifetime, he did not have time to deal with social matters:

"He regretted that he had not ordered that they should not mourn him. But because he was busy before he died, repeating his Talmud, he shifted his mind from matters of the seeming world."

What emerges is a picture of three strata:

1. The Tzadik, standing above society.
2. Society.
3. The encroacher, standing outside society and below it. <sup>12</sup>

It is easier for the encroacher to establish contact with the Tzadik, who stands above society and therefore outside it, than with the rest of society. <sup>13</sup>

Agnon allows the encroacher to take the fateful step of trying to attain the unattainable. The absurd situation is dramatized by the

crescendo of laying him in the Tzadik's coffin. The moment of truth, which arrives with the appearance of the angel "Dumah", throws a light on his entire past. He cannot answer positively the question "Have you dealt in Torah?", and because he arrived where he ends as a result of his way of life: "The vain honour which he desired caused him to be laid in the grave of a Tzadik and be burried before his time", we must see his way of life in the absurd light emanating from his grave.

It must be asked: What is Agnon attempting to indicate? Whom is he challenging? The "encroacher" is a well known phenomenon in society, known and recognized by all. If so, what has Agnon told us here.

He seems to be dealing with three major issues:

1. The negative struggle.
2. The components of a leader's personality.
3. The guilt of the community.

1. The negative struggle.

We witness the encroacher in his struggle to climb from outside the social ladder to its top rung. All his efforts are concentrated on one point - honour. Along his entire path he is interested only in the honour which will be his, and he pays no attention to permanent values.

The complete unimportance of his achievement is further emphasized by its happening side by side with the death of the Tzadik and his funeral, that is, the background for his social climb is death and nothingness, next to which his achievements are of no value.

2. The components of a leader's personality.

The encroacher's fate after he is laid in the coffin is not our concern. We are interested in the encroacher prior to this stage. Having undergone all stages of "progress", he is seen as fulfilling the role of warden and community leader. It is not difficult to imagine the feelings and thoughts of one who achieves status in this manner. His frustration, knowing his ignorance and the worthlessness of his personality cause him to behave like those wardens whom Agnon has so clearly described and condemned.

In this story, a detailed in-depth picture of an ignorant warden is drawn. He is coarse and suspicious, placing himself above his community. Step by step, we saw the formation of such a warden, and the components of his personality were presented one by one.

3. The guilt of the community.

In his attempt to expose lay leadership, we are shown the problem from all sides, including those which are generally neglected.

Agnon is crying out against society, whose nonchalance enables those unworthy to control it. This could not happen were society less apathetic, and hence the fault for such leaders lies with society, in the manner of "not the mouse is the thief, but the hole is the thief." <sup>14</sup>

Agnon refers particularly to what is commonly known as the "intelligencia". We are presented with people standing in circles, which surround each other and revolve around one focal point. Their eyes are on the coffin and their ears are with the eulogists. They are concentrating both spiritually and intellectually, and their face is towards the centre. They are therefore turning their backs on the outside world, and are exposing it to any nameless outsider who might care to gain control over it.

In so doing, they are at least partially guilty, in Agnon's eyes, of allowing the lay leadership and various askanim to be the ones who set the tone. For this, Agnon blames society.

To sum up, let us quote words of Agnon from another source:

"The wise men  
Do not give a hand to the running of the world  
Because they know  
That there are men wiser than they,  
And they want  
The world to be led  
By the perfectly wise.  
Meanwhile  
The wicked and the foolish jump in  
And take the world in their hands  
And lead the world  
According to their villainy  
And in measure with their stupidity." <sup>15</sup>



REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "UPON THE DEATH OF THE TZADIK"  
OR  
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

1. Elu Ve'Elu p. 181 - 186
2. This is to be compared with Agnon's description of how a warden forces his own will on the community, though it be against the community's will and benefit. Elu Ve'Elu p. 151
3. Respecting those in a society who are worthy of it is indicative of the society's moral standard. In Moses' recollection of the sending of the spies (Deutoronomy, 1, 22) Rashi sees implications of social disorder, while on approaching Moses at the giving of the Torah, each man approaches in his turn, and Rashi see this as implying a moral and ordered society.
4. These are the secular leaders of the Jewish public "The great men of the generation came together and became a committee of Four Lands ... to strengthen the will of Heaven ... and the counts of the communities and their wise men worked for the good of Israel .... and the rabbis were sitting on chairs and the wardens were standing above them, each warden above his rabbi". (The Bridal Canopy p. 140)  
See also Midrash Tanchuma to Shoftim, 2.
5. Pe-ah 1, 1
6. According to our sages, envy is one of those things "which drive a man out of the world". (Avot, 4, 21, Pirkei derabbi Eliezer, 13)
7. Kohelet Rabba, 1, 34
8. For a full discussion of "miracle" see "Chananya".
9. Our sages were well aware of the danger in associating with an ignoramus. "What is a scholar compared to in the eyes of an ignoramus? To a gold jug. If he speaks to him - to a silver jug. Benefits from him -

an earthenware jug. Once it is broken, it can never be repaired." (Sanhedrin, 52, 2).

10. These two groups are also the only two who have a place in the deceased Tzadik's thoughts: "He sorrowed for the fortune that had been spent on the journey, for it should have been given to poor learned men to buy bread. Indeed, that disciple fainted only because he had eaten nothing on account of his poverty."
11. His impudence against heaven reminds of another negative character in Agnon, the songster in KeDavid Chashvu Lehem Klei Shir. See Elu Ve'Elu p. 315
12. This is similar to the picture presented in "Chananya" and in "Those Good Old Days". There, too, are three strata, representing society, and those which stand above and below it:

Bilvav Yamim

The Bridal Canopy

Chananya

The Rabbi of Apta

The Olim-Nilbavim

R. Yudel Chassid

He whose name we have forgotten.

R. Yisrael Shlomo

In the story "In Forrest and Town" (Elu Ve'Elu p. 267) the picture is similar:

The old man approaching his last days.

The boy.

Frantzishak the murderer.

13. In our sources, too, we find contact between those standing above and below society. See Rashi to Numbers, 11, 1.
14. Gittin 45, 1
15. Shira p. 191

## ERETZ YISRAEL

We have so far dealt with several planes and backgrounds which Agnon used for discussion of "struggle". We have seen the relation to it of both communities and individuals, and also that though the object for struggle sometimes changes, in Agnon's eyes the need for it exists perpetually. The preceding chapters included examples which showed that even what is supposedly "Those Good Old Days" necessitates struggle.

We have also dealt with the matter of aliyah to Eretz Yisrael, and its implications concerning the central theme of this paper. However, this treatment concerned "ideal" aliyah, whose participants ascended to Eretz Yisrael with the specific intention of worshipping their Creator in His Holy Land.

In the following chapters we will discuss Agnon's approach and stand on the Jewish national revival of the present times. Through examining his approach to the central topic, we will also relate to his attitude to the national and religious problems which are an inevitable result of that revival. We will attempt to prove that in this matter, too, Agnon's practicality manifests itself.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHY DID YITZCHAK KUMMER DIE?

### WHY DID YITZCHAK KUMMER DIE?

Many critics have troubled and floundered to solve the mystery of the reason for Yitzchak Kummer's death. The dramatic and tragic ending to the life of the hero of the novel "Tmol Shilshom" demands a logical explanation. Those who have dealt with the novel have suggested many ways of settling the problem.

Let us first see the author's own approach. We have two versions of Agnon's approach to the death:

"And now, good fellows, when we look at Yitzchak's happenings we stand shaking and amazed. This Yitzchak, who was no worse than any other man, why was he punished so? Was it for provoking a dog? Surely he did it only in jest . . . . It is easy for those who do not trouble themselves with unnecessary thoughts, whether because of excess naivete or excess wisdom, but one who is not very naive or not very wise, how will he answer it? What will he say to it?"<sup>1</sup>

That is to say, the author leaves the mystery unsolved, ending the section with a question mark. This question mark seems to be suspended over the entire Yitzchak Kummer affair.

Is it possible? Can Agnon have led us to participate in every event of Yitzchak's life, can he have shown us every detail in his complex path, only to end it with a question mark?

And the question "but one who is not very naive or not very wise, how will he answer it? What will he say to it?" - is it

rhetorical? Or is it a real question, a challenge to the reader, saying "My dear reader, you who are most probably neither very naive, nor very wise, how do you answer it? What do you say to it?"

Indeed, what do we say? What can we say? "Why was he punished so?" Agnon asks, indicating that Kummer's death is punishment. But for what? We are told that the transgression is so severe as to call for the punishment of death. That is all. It is up to us, then, to discover in Yitzchak Kummer's actions a transgression so weighty as to be in proportion to the punishment.

In the following pages are presented several suggestions, assumptions and theories about the transgression. We will examine the extent to which they stand the test of comparing weight of supposed transgression to weight of death sentence.

Agnon himself had a suggestion about the reason for Yitzchak Kummer's death, but it is not given within the framework of the novel:

"I asked him why he killed Yitzchak Kummer. One can conceive of other solutions! He said: I could not leave him in the Yishuv Yashan but who knows? He might establish a family through Shifra, and will have a continuation." <sup>2</sup>

Agnon elegantly evaded answering the direct question put to him. From his words, the impression might be gained that Kummer reached the Yishuv Yashan, which is for him a cul-de-sac,

by mistake. Not knowing what to do with Yitzchak Kummer, who is in the wrong environment, he killed him. This would seem as the ideal solution, except for the fact that all of Agnon's work is preplanned very carefully,<sup>3</sup> and so the above approach is unacceptable. Also, if Agnon is dissatisfied with Yitzchak's stay in Mea Shearim of the Yishuv Yashan then he can always make him leave in the same way he made him enter. It seems to me, therefore, that the reason quoted in "Shai Agnon Be-Al Reh" is not the true reason for Kummer's death, and comes to cover rather than reveal the truth.<sup>4</sup>

Let us examine briefly several of the critics' approaches.

Lander feels that:

"The sin of transitoriness drags behind him ( Kummer M.Y.H) It is embodied in a dog, symbol of the loneliness and light headedness of the lost and wandering generation. It kills him and takes away his life".

However, he himself is not certain of this, for he adds:

"And the author's explanation to this story in itself is bewildering, and has no explanation, and ends on a stalemate".

Kurtzweil also deals with this subject:

"I have tried to discover Yitzchaks' sin ... it is no coincidence that he dies after his marriage, after he has been enslaved, though in the best possible manner, by a woman."<sup>6</sup>

Is the marriage between a humble girl like Shifra of Mea Shearim, and Yitzchak the painter, an "enslavement by a woman"? From the description of her character no indication is given that from the marriage and onward, Yitzchak will be "enslaved" by a woman. Had Shifra been like Sonya, or had Yitzchak married Sonya, one would expect him to lead a servile life. And even if this would be the case, is it a mortal sin? Does he deserve death, and so unnatural a death at that, for being enslaved by a woman? Kurtzweil himself calls it an enslavement "in the best possible manner".

Moreover, there is nothing unnatural in men taking wives at a particular time in their lives. Yitzchak, in marrying is doing what his father did before him, and his father's father, too. Never, in literature or in real life, are men bitten by stray dogs and sentenced to an agonizing death following their marrying a woman.

S.Y. Pnueli sees Kummer's death as the fulfilment of an evil decree:

"The hand of fate functions rhythmically, swiftly, securely, goaded by the decree passed in the past, when the train in which Yitzchak Kummer journeyed to the homeland of his dreams, roaring and rumbling, passes through a tunnel. This decree awaits Yitzchak Kummer to do his deed, and then it is executed. This decree has no basis and no reason, and is no more than the jealousy of evil gods, who are also powerless to change or prevent anything." 7



Pnueli confesses that he could not find a reason for Kummer's death, and therefore he puts the blame for his guiltless death at the feet of "evil gods", those gods who are waiting for Yitzchak Kummer to act so that they can execute their decree. Pnueli does not inform us when this decree was passed, why, and what Kummer has to do to press the trigger which activates this decree.

The word "gods" used by Pnueli is alien to the atmosphere and being of Tmol Shilshom.

Furthermore, the lyrical and innocent description of Yitzchak's travels in the train, part of which is racing through the tunnel, the rest through fields of the Kaizer's empire, reveals the pastoral view as seen through the eyes of the youth from a village, Yitzchak, who is witnessing the world outside for the first time.<sup>8</sup> The distance between this description and the death of Yitzchak, from a geographical point of view, a time point of view, but mainly in relation to the content and the substance; is as vast as the distance between the beginning of the novel and its end.

Y. Rabinowitz also belongs to that school of thought which attributes Kummer's death to the workings of fate:

".... eventually, the writer ends the dog - "Hero's" life out of a madness in him, as he ends the hereo's life out of a vague suicidal urge, which was affixed to his body, and he did not know for what. Does Agnon do this to his story deliberately? The dog's comic-grotesque blind fate is bound into the language of the story with such creative joy,

as though in the expressionistic naturalism the author is fulfilling an ancient aesthetic desire. The chain reaction which maddens Balak's entire being is a kind of external ruination, which pushes itself from some unknown spiritual abyss onto all that exists." 9

M. Tochner has several suggestions. The most concise:

"Balak chases and pesters him. Kummer declares that he is a mad dog. For this lightheadedness, the God of Spirits revenges. When his path reaches its circular end, Balak directs his venom at him. Against his will, he too begins to bark like a dog. Kummer dies." 10

Tochner sees Kummer and the dog as two halves of one split personality, the split personality of Yitzchak Kummer "... that which is lacking in Kummer is present in him - reflex and dialectic." 11

Even if we accept the idea of Kummer and the dog sharing a soul, it must still be explained why Kummer died for writing on the dog that he is mad. In any case, accusing what is supposedly his second half of madness does not justify a death sentence.

Yaakov Katz takes the same line of approach as Tochner, and sees the dog as

"... an expression of Yitzchak's suppressed doubts. These doubts were destined to burst into Yitzchak's life and hinder him. They burst dramatically at the first meeting with their carrier, the dog. The seeming return to the world of tradition is doomed to failure." 12

This theory disregards the disproportion between the sin and its punishment. It would be adequate for Yitzchak Kummer to be ejected from Meah Shearing. Why did he have to die?

Shalom Kramer feels that the death is due to a lack of faith on the part of Yitzchak:

"R. Yudel who was of complete faith, had merit and therefore a miracle occurred to him and he found the treasure, but Krummer, who's faith decreased, had no merit and therefore died a quick death from the bite of a dog." <sup>13</sup>

To counter this, we must ask: if the reward for faith is the miracle of finding a treasure, surely the punishment for lack of faith must be not finding the treasure.

Kramer seems to have sensed this difficulty, for he too uses "fate" as a reason for Kummer's death, and adds: "The philosopher - dog bit him to obey the command of fate, whose foundation is irony".

A. Band sees Kummer's dying, though innocent, as a symbol for the Holocaust of European Jewry. <sup>14</sup> This interpretation is somewhat forced, and a thorough reading of his essay will reveal that he wavers and has reservations from his own statement. <sup>15</sup>

Yeshurun Keshet deals with the problem of the dog, but ignores the question of Yitzchak's death:

"Balak is for Yitzchak what Yitzchak is for Chemdat . . . . That which Yitzchak did to Balak was done only to counter what Sonya

did to him: she treated him as one treats a dog, and drove him mad. At first she was affectionate towards him and then she suddenly kicked him .... and he did so to Balak." 16

To conclude, let us bring G. Shaked's original interpretation:

"Yitzchak is a ritual victim of that eternal split between diaspora and redemption, Judaism and Zionism. Like Isaac the patriarch, he too is a victim sacrificed on Mount Moriah, but God does not find a substitute ... there is a plague in the town and it is not redeemed and does not begin a renaissance until the scapegoat has been sacrificed ... a character which is the innocent victim of events caused by itself, (its relations with the "Sitra Achra" - (other side - forces of evil, in the form of the dog) .... Shai Agnon saw Kummer as an innocent victim, helpless and unaided, of a transitory period whose heroes are "a generation of the desert", torn between two extremes. The end shows that the writer feels that it is by virtue of these victims that the plague ceased - the curse on that generation paved the road to a new life." 17

Shaked's interpretation does not explain why it was Krummer who was chosen to be the victim. Does writing on a dog establish such relations with the "Sitra Achra" as would justify death?

Having quoted from many critics, 18 and commented briefly on their theories, the question of the reason for Yitzchak Kummer's death still stands unanswered.

Yitzchak Kummer is the hero of Tmol Shilshom, he is the character whom we follow throughout its life until his death. We must therefore assume that the author's chief concern is Yitzchak and his history. His death is the climax of the book, and it is therefore fitting that we examine his life until he reaches his end - his death being the most significant and dramatic event in the novel.

We are now faced with two possibilities.

The first is to discover in Yitzchak a single act of villainy, with wickedness of such magnitude as to bring in its wake a death sentence, and erasure of he who commits it from this earth. Does such a crime exist in the book? Having gone through all the possibilities, we have not found one of such magnitude.<sup>19</sup>

And because the possibility of punishment for a single deed isn't applicable, it must be disregarded. If so, another possibility must be sought, and this will be done further on. What is already clear is that the death of Yitzchak, so central and significant in the novel, must be connected inseparably with his life, his actions and neglects, his thoughts, ideas and every aspect of his daily routine.

What then are the real reasons for it?

A reading of the last chapter of Tmol Shilshom indicates the connection between the event of Yitzchak's death and the period of plenty which follows it. G. Saked has already pointed out this connection, and although I find his explanation of it unacceptable, the connection nonetheless exists. This connection strengthens the assumption that Yitzchak died because of a sin. As long as he lived, the land was cursed, when he died, the curse was lifted. From the fact that relief came to the land after his death, it can be concluded that his sin was not of a private nature, concerning only him and his Maker, but it was in some way connected to the land, its settlement and life in it. It was enough to cause drought, sorrow, and difficulties so severe that they weighed upon the everyday life in the land to the extent of threatening the existence of the Jewish settlement.

What then is this sin?

Yitzchak lived and functioned in the land (Israel), and we must therefore examine his actions in the light of life and its demands in Israel, and in the light of that which Agnon expects from any who live in the land. We must investigate whether Agnon does indeed take a stand in this issue, and if so, what is it.

This investigation will be carried out in the following chapter, and then we will ask, once again, why Yitzchak Kummer died.

REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "WHY DID YITZCHAK KUMMER DIE"

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1. Tmol Shilshom p. 604
2. D. Kna'ani: Shai Agnon Be-Al Peh, p. 21

In fact, in Agnon's manuscripts there is a continuation to Tmol Shilshom, in it, there is consolation in that Shifra has a daughter whom she names Yehudit. This Yehudit joins a group of agricultural workers and "in this group was a charming youth, Gideon, who is the son of Yarkoni, son of Sonya. They saw each other and liked each other ...." This is from manuscript 1:381 of the Agnon Archives in the manuscript department of The National Library at the Hebrew University. It was published by G. Shaked under the heading Shai Agnon - Epilog li Tmol Shilshom, in Moznayim, Shvat 5731, p. 212-213

3. "... nothing which Agnon ever published was an improvisation about which it can be said that he was not aware of all the implications. He wrote, erased, corrected, polished once, twice, thrice, gave it to his wife or daughter to type and this product was polished again and again until it got its final shape. Often he would reexamine what was on his desk after weeks, months, or even years ...." A.Y. Braver: Mah Tamun Bakelev? in Moznayim, Adar A 5733, p. 185
4. See above p. 40-41 for the reliability of an authors statement on his work.
5. P. Lander in Moznayim, Adar 5706, p. 273
6. B. Kurtzweil Masot p. 113 - 114
7. S.Y. Pnueli Yetzirato Shel Shai Agnon, p. 91
8. See 'Tmol Shilshom' pp. 22-25
9. Y. Rabinowitz, Darkei Agnon Be-Itzuv Giboro Hasipuri, in Shorashim Umegamot p. 279

10. M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 79. See also 67, 70, 197
11. ibid. p. 76
12. Y. Katz, Mul Hamevucha Hadatit, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 177
13. S. Kramer, Shai Agnon - Realism Ushvirato, p. 139
14. A. Band, Hachet Ve-Onsho Bi "Tmol Shilshom" in Molad Iyar-Sivan 5727, p. 75-81
15. These reservations will be better understood when taking into account that large sections of Tmol Shilshom were not only written but already published, by the mid-thirties. See: Yochanan Arnon, Biliographia al Summuel Yosef Agnon ViYtzirato. p. 13 no. 144, p. 21 no. 340, p. 44 no. 909.  
  
A. Band himself, in "Nostalgia and Nightmare" p. 416 and p. 447, writes that the beginning of Tmol Shilshom is in two chapters written in 1909.
16. Y. Keshet, Pirkei Agnon - Havdalot p. 163
17. G. Shaked, Chelkat HaSadeh Hanetusha, in Moznayim, Shavat 5731, p. 213.
18. For further suggestions on the death of Yitzchak Kummer, see:
  1. E. Ben-Ezer, Haze-evim VeHakvasim in Moznayim, Adar A, 5733. p.
  2. A.Y. Braver, Mah Tamun Bakeler, in Moznayim, Adar A 5733 "... he was punished by heaven for the insult to this pathetic creature, he did neither him nor any other person any harm." (p. 185
  3. A. Netzer, Hasipur "Agunot" Umekomo Bemichlol Yetzirato shel Agnon, in Bisden Chemed, Shvat-Adar 5731, p. 291



4. Y. Orent, Hirhurei Hasofer Kitfilat Yachid, in Molad, Av 5718, p. 401, 403
  5. E. Schweid, Kelev Chutzot Ve-Adam, in Molad, Av 5718, p. 387
  6. L.Y. Yudkin, Escape into Siege p. 51
19. Because a thorough examination of Yitzchak's past does not yield results, the critics dwell on the childish act of writing on the dog and see it as demonic, horrifying and shocking.

CHAPTER NINE

SHAI AGNON'S ERETZ YISRAEL

## SHAI AGNON'S ERETZ YISRAEL

It is known to Agnon's readers and to his critics that he dealt widely with the problems and questions pertaining to Eretz Yisrael. His major books: "A Guest for the Night", "Tmol Shilshom", and "Shira" all deal, entirely or partially, with life in Eretz Yisrael, and his other books and many of his short stories are connected, directly or indirectly, with the Land. Tochner did an excellent service in identifying the Jerusalemite wise man with Agnon.<sup>1</sup> This identification taught us not only the identity of the writer of "The Song of the Letters"<sup>2</sup>, but also Agnon's personal attitude to the question of resettling of Eretz Yisrael.

Moreover, we learn that Agnon has a didactic interest in his writings, and he comes to express and propound his view on the important topical issue of building the Land:

"Agnon says it distinctly, in fact he almost declares it, that there has been no change in the authentic meaning of "The Bridal Canopy". Then, as now, his ideological platform is love of God, love of Torah, and love of Eretz Yisrael. His ideal Jewry is that of R. Yudel, and the Eretz Yisrael he desires is to be found in "The Song of the Letters".<sup>3</sup>

Tochner sees the main importance of treating "The Song of the Letters" as contemporary and topical in its relationship to questions of religion:

In "Tmol Shilshom" .... Agnon displayed an undisputable affinity to the question of religion and its status in our present being: Kummer's death and Balak's madness are the fruits of disappointment from Meah Shearim - the marred substitute for the world of the past, and disappointment from the new Eretz Yisrael ... The fundamental question: Can a monumental work, which delves in the basic spiritual problems of a nation's life, can it remain indifferent? More precisely, may the religious issue .... which nourishes Agnon's work, be weightless and lacking any obligatory meaning? .... In any case, the affinity of this actual spiritual problem to its aesthetic expression and real meaning, as other spiritual questions, are still in need of much clarification. <sup>4</sup>

That is to say, Tochner claims that Agnon dealt with topical issues that are major to the people of Israel, and he also reaches this conclusion in connection with "The Song of the Letters", but he limits Agnon's involvement to the religious issues, and even here, he leaves the gateway open, saying that they "are still in need of much clarification".

Yeshurun Keshet limits matters even further and claims that Agnon's attitude to settling and building Eretz Yisrael is determined by a spiritual and abstract scale alone:

Agnon's love of Eretz Yisrael is a spiritual and visionary love, and it preceeds taking any stand on the act of settling Eretz Yisrael and the activities towards our self-redemption .... the affection for Eretz Yisrael originates from love of Israel (the nation - M.Y.H.), and is therefore only the quality of those Jews that were imbued with the traditional Jewish life in the diaspora. However,

this is not the approach of practical Zionism, which turned to Eretz Yisrael because of distaste for the diaspora. Indeed, in this sense Agnon is not a Zionist.<sup>5</sup>

What is common to Tochner and Keshet is that they both see Agnon, in his literary undertaking, as investigating issues of religion, vision and spirituality.

Now the same logic which drives the critic to investigate the author's stand on the ideological points of religion-vision-spirit will not allow him to stop before searching for the author's opinion and its manifestations concerning other practical and topical issues to do with the upbuilding of the land. It cannot be assumed that Agnon dealt with the aforementioned ideological issues, and ignored the remainder of the wide spectrum of problems which face the new and renewed settlement of Jews in the land of their fathers, the author being an integral part of this settlement.

To clarify the above, one quotation from a text:

"After the riots of 5689 (1929 C.E. - M.Y.H.), when the Arabs destroyed my house and I remained without a roof over my head .... And in the bad days, when a man left his house and could not return home because of the curfew which the British would suddenly announce ...."<sup>6</sup>

Is it possible that Agnon would treat such a situation nonchalantly?

Is it possible that a situation in which Arabs destroy Jewish houses and British arrest Jews, a situation which is a personal tragedy for the

author and a national tragedy for the entire Jewish settlement, would draw from the author mention alone, without a stand being taken by him? Would a writer like Agnon withdraw into an ivory tower, writing for the sake of writing and dealing in art for arts sake, under such physical conditions?

In this chapter, we will verify Tochner and Keshet's outlook, but will go even further, broadening the spectrum and showing that Agnon dwells on a range of other issues, which exceed the spiritual and visionary, having to do with the everyday problems facing a Jew who lives in Eretz Yisrael, as well as with the problems facing the Jewish public as a whole.

To this end, we will first have to discover what is Agnon's conception of the ideal Jew.

### AGNON'S IDEAL JEW

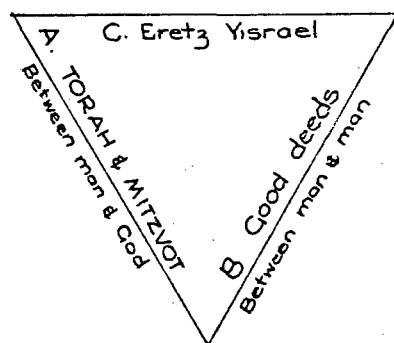
Discovering the author's point of observation when he created a particular work is the beginning of the function and the ultimate achievement of a critic in the field of fiction.<sup>7</sup>

From what follows emerges that Agnon had a clear cut point of view and observation on the question of what goes to make up an ideal Jew, and he states it unequivocally.<sup>8</sup>

The ideal Jew must have three qualities. He must:

1. Observe commandments pertaining to relations between man and God.
2. Observe commandments pertaining to relations between man and man.
3. Live, or desire to live, in Eretz Yisrael.

These three attributes  
might be illustrated  
in a triangle



These desirable qualities will hence be referred to as "the triangle".<sup>9</sup>

A. Let us first look at R. Yudel, archetype to those whom Agnon favours:

"R. Yudel set the matter of Eretz Yisrael to his heart and became ashamed of himself that he wanders from place to place and drags his feet only to return, eventually, to Brod, and even if he will be so lucky as to deal again in Torah and Mitzvot and good deeds, he will still not have attained even half of perfection, for perfection is attained only in Eretz Yisrael."<sup>10</sup>

The Jerusalemite who was watching R. Yudel:

"... saw in him, in addition to his piety and love of his fellow men, a kind of light found only in one whose heart is bound to Eretz Yisrael."<sup>11</sup>

We learn three things about R. Yudel:

1. He deals in Torah and Mitzvot.
2. He does good deeds.
3. Sees the ultimate perfection in Eretz Yisrael.

The Jerusalemite who watches R. Yudil sees in him the same three things:

- i) Piety.
- ii) Love of his fellow men.
- iii) A light found only in those who are bound to Eretz Yisrael.

In addition to the above, R. Yudil expresses his ties to Eretz Yisrael on many occasions throughout "The Bridal Canopy"

R. Yudil said: "The destination of any Jew can only be Eretz Yisrael, and as for me, whose head and thoughts are in Eretz Yisrael it is as though I am entirely there, for the whole body follows the head." <sup>12</sup>

R. Yudil said: "I have never envied anyone but one woman, who ascended to Eretz Yisrael, and I never scorned anyone but Mechl Beadle, who could have ascended and did not ascend." <sup>13</sup>

Jealousy was not one of R. Yudil's qualities, yet we witness him in his jealousy, and while he never disdained anyone, he did not hide his scorn for Mechel the Beadle.

The crowning point of the many remarks on Eretz Yisrael in "The Bridal Canopy" is also the finale of the book dealing with R. Yudil's successes, and is a description of his ultimate success:



"The success of R. Yudel himself, who, together with his wife, was so privileged near the end of his life as to ascend to Eretz Yisrael and dwell in the light of life . . . . He would accept any trouble and difficulty with joy and he would say: "all the troubles in the world are worthwhile for Eretz Yisrael." <sup>14</sup>

- B. Another pleasant character, R. Shlomo Bach, is described by Agnon as follows:

"I looked at that old man  
that love of God  
and love of men were visible on his face." <sup>15</sup>

This old man goes to live in Eretz Yisrael. After his aliyah too, he is faithful to the "triangle", he learns those tractates dealing with Mitzvot of the land, saying "learning brings to action." He is personally involved in agricultural work, cultivating fields, gardens, vineyards and orchards with the members of Kibbutz Ramat Rachel. <sup>16</sup>

We see the old man:

1. Studying Torah.
2. Being involved with his fellow men.
3. Living in Eretz Yisrael.

- C. The charming old Cantor, Chemdat, <sup>17</sup> receives a most favourable treatment from Agnon. He, too, has all three

good qualities. It is needless to say that he fulfils the commandments of God - his praying, and his behaviour in his home on the eve of the day of atonement, are ample proof of that. He also fulfils the commandments pertaining to relationships between man and man, pacifying enemies. "He went to Tiltshi, and peace was restored" <sup>18</sup>. He is liked by his wife, and "lies" to please her. After eating and drinking excessively, he returns home to his wife who has a meal ready for him and says "Ask my young friend here whether I tasted more than necessary in order to comply with rules of etiquette".<sup>19</sup>

He is well liked by his congregation and his God:

"All the assembled blessed with him silently and joyfully. They were indeed justified in their joy, for they had become as a new creature by virtue of their happiness in fulfilling God's commandment, for Chemdat had awakened their hearts with his prayers."<sup>20</sup>

This same Chemdat is conscious of the third side of the "triangle". On his way to the synagogue on the Eve of the Day of Atonement:

... he said, "when I remember that a year ago I stood here, confident that the following year we would be in Eretz Yisrael, and a whole year has passed and yet I stand here, shamed before my maker. Malka, do not cry, God will let us live and privilege us and he will soon take us up to his city." <sup>21</sup>

As has been shown, <sup>22</sup> the bearer of the name "Chemdat" is identical with Agnon.

- D. The "triangle" and it's attainment are described most dramatically in Ma-Aseh Hameshulach<sup>23</sup> (Tale of the Enissary).

From it we may conclude that prior to the arrival of the messenger from Eretz Yisrael, the towns people had only one of the three desired qualities. We read of their phenomenal learnedness: "Even a babe who had never seen a lung and could not shake a lulav, knew the laws of non kosher lungs as well as he knew the laws of Etrog". We do not read of their fulfilling commandments between man and man. They were not givers of charity, deliberately refraining from giving it. After we are told that "Their Kuppat Rabbi Meir Ba-al Hanes (collection box for charity for poor in Eretz Yisrael - M.Y.H.) was standing empty and was covered with a cobweb as thick as a coin." - we would expect to be told that although they did not give charity to the poor of Eretz Yisrael they took care of their own poor. Not so!:

Heaven forbid that these noble of heart were far from charity, but they said, our land is the land of Israel and our city is Jerusalem, and instead of scattering a fortune for the poor, minded of Eretz Yisrael, that not even one good book has come out of there, let us rather build for ourselves a big house of study, and glorify it with beautiful books.

That is to say that even the money which they had intended for charity did not reach the hands of the poor, of Eretz Yisrael or elsewhere, but went to the building of a house of study.

In other words, they studied Torah and obeyed the laws of man and God, but they paid no attention to the laws of man and man, and neglected Eretz Yisrael, its dwellers, its poor and its scholars.

In such a state of affairs, they needed a shock to jolt them, and their insulting, of the Emissary, served this function. After it, they adopted the other two qualities, and so completed the triangle:

"And on the day of fasting they say many penitentiary hymns and supplications, and learn about holiness and about purity, for they make for awakening and devoutness in the towns of our land and in the city of our God. And they gave much charity to the poor of our holy land".

E. Refa-el the scribe <sup>24</sup> distinguishes himself in the "triangle", and for this reason he merits his saintly, painless death.

1. His obeying all commandments in relation to God is self evident throughout the story.
2. Between man and man: "And he was saved from all transgressions between man and man". <sup>25</sup> Even when others "tell Refa-el what his eyes have seen, he listens out of respect and answers humbly 'My dear Jew, let us not speak discreditingly of the nation of God' ". <sup>26</sup>
3. As for Eretz Yisrael "... its earth spilt on the floor of his house, and his heart quaked as that of a man who stands on holy soil". <sup>27</sup>

F. To conclude, let us bring the opinion of the poet of "The Song of the Letters", who is the Jerusalemite wise man, who is Agnon's mouthpiece.<sup>29</sup> In three rounds of the Hebrew alphabet, we hear of the sons learning the Bible, oral law, and secular trades. We are told that they fulfil laws of man and man, and man and God, yet the song is not complete, nor can it be complete, without the aliyah of father and sons to Eretz Yisrael. The reader feels the song ascending towards the climax of aliyah, and only when that has been accomplished, and the third side of the "triangle" is in place, the poet is satisfied and "his soul regained its peace".<sup>30</sup>

These examples, drawn from hundreds of references by Agnon to Eretz Yisrael indicate that in his opinion, no Jew can reach self realization while living in the diaspora. Well has A. Rabinowitz expressed this idea, that the striving for aliyah to Eretz Yisrael is one of the pillars of Agnon's work:

"In "Tmol Shilshom" the writer finds it necessary to indicate that Yitzchak Kummer is R. Yudel's grandson. In so doing, he implies that what happens to Yitzchak Kummer, of the second aliyah, in Eretz Yisrael, is indeed a continuation of what happens to R. Yudel, both in the most physical sense and in the striving for aliyah."<sup>31</sup>

"The entire novel ("Tmol Shilshom") is that to which "The Bridal Canopy" and "A Guest for the Night" strived, and it is there that they are redeemed."<sup>32</sup>

The author's own biography completes the proof for that which barely needs proof - that Agnon sees the duty of each Jew in the diaspora to go up to Eretz Yisrael, and the duty of a Jew who is already there - to cling to it.

### ALIYAH TO ERETZ YISRAEL - IN WHAT MANNER?

Agnon does not absolve himself from dealing with a problem which was prevalent in his time, and is still prevalent, though to a lesser extent, today - in which manner is aliyah to be accomplished? <sup>33</sup>

Early Zionism had much opposition. Agnon touches only minimally on the assimilating section of the Jewish people, who were among the opposers. <sup>34</sup> However, he fights the battle of Zionism courageously and valiantly among its ultra orthodox opposers. It seems to me that the motto for 'Tmol Shilshom' and perhaps for a majority of his literary undertaking, is words said when Yitzchak Kummer has left his father's house, and is journeying by train from his village to Lemberg:

"There are those who wish for a miraculous redemption, and there are those who wish for redemption in a natural manner." <sup>35</sup>

Clearly, Agnon takes a stand on this issue, and leaves no doubt as to which side he supports. However, his stand is not quite so simple, for he does not necessarily see a contradiction between miraculous redemption and natural redemption.

We have dealt with the concept of "miracle" in the chapter "Chananya" and have seen that he does not negate the meaning

given to the word by Mistress Milka, R. Alter the teacher and the other Nilbavim, which means that he sees even natural aliyah as miraculous. For this reason he can fight his battle fortified by the justice of his cause, the cause of aliyah which seems natural but is, in fact, miraculous, the miracle being the fulfilment of the prophecies of solace which our prophets prophesized in the distant past, that is to say, the miracle of messianic days.

It is worth following Agnon's description of some rabbis who negate aliyah, being opposers of "natural redemption". Although these rabbis belong to different periods of time, their opposition to aliyah and Zionism unites them. Already in 'Bilvav Yamim' we encounter a rabbi who opposes Olim and their aliyah.

"The whole town went out to accompany them, all but the rabbi. He used to say: "Those who journey to Eretz Yisrael before Messiah comes are to me like the lads who jump and dance in front of a bride and a groom before the marriage ceremony".<sup>36</sup>

The grotesque rabbi of Pitshirtz also opposes Zionism. He prides himself on his pamphlet, in which he writes:

"Recently, we were joined by wicked criminals who call themselves Zionists. They have no God in their hearts and they force matters and they were not satisfied until they decided to have a ball. For that we, the Bet Din of Justice have seen it fit to prevent this villainy and warn every Jew, man, woman and child, not to set a foot, heaven forbid, in that ball this evening."<sup>37</sup>

Agnon expresses his opinion of the rabbi in a most subtle manner. After the pamphlet is read out, a stone is thrown into the rabbi's house and

"... he lowered his voice and said to me:  
Please look into my mouth. I suspect they  
have broken my last tooth."

In this, Agnon seems to see "thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly." <sup>38</sup>

Yitzchak Kummer, in his journey from Lemberg to Cracow, meets Chassidim who oppose aliyah as a whole and his aliyah in particular:

"Yitzchak thought to himself, why, these people are Chassidim of the same rabbi who reviled and abused the Zionists wherever and when he could revile and abuse them. And last year ... the Sabbath when the Blessing for the month of Av is said ... when he came to that part of the Prayer of the Month when the blessing for speedy redemption is said, he added a curse to the blessing, shouting as loud as he could "but not by these villainous heretics of our time", and then for fear that the Holy One, Blessed be his name, is not familiar with the holy tongue, he translated his words to yiddish: "De Epikorsim vus zeinen in unzeretzeitein." <sup>39</sup>

How well Agnon describes the foundering of the rabbi in "A Guest for the Night".

"Once again his eyes became blocked with tears which dropped to his fine beard and shone there like precious stones and pearls which a jeweller had set in gold. He did not look at these precious



stones and pearls but he spited me and said such things to me as I cannot repeat because of the prohibition against defaming Eretz Yisrael." <sup>40</sup>

How different the rabbi is from his fellow townsman, R. Shlomo Bach, who ascends to Eretz Yisrael!

The rabbi's conversation with the story teller, and carefully chosen words of defence and support which he says when describing its dwellers are one of the climaxes of Agnon's writing, and a masterpiece in art. A love of the people of Israel and the land of Israel, love genuine and sincere, is expressed in these passages. Unluckily, the rabbi's hatred overcomes the arguments of his partner in conversation. Here, too, Agnon draws on the sources to express his distaste for the rabbi. The rabbi says: "If I am a king (as it is said that rabbies are as kings) <sup>41</sup> why haven't you come to see me until now?" <sup>42</sup> These very words are said by the Roman commander, Vespasian, to R. Yochanan Ben Zakai, during the siege on Jerusalem. <sup>43</sup> This comparison is most unflattering to the rabbi, and it becomes progressively clearer that Agnon disagrees strongly with opposers of natural aliyah.

Agnon is consistent in his support of natural aliyah, and he reiterates this support at every opportunity. One example of this is the affair of the key in "A Guest for the Night". The key is a central motif in that novel, and its mystery occupies the reader for a major part of the book. The key has disappeared. The old key is lost, and is replaced by the new key. The symbolism here is clear, and has been dwelled upon by many critics. <sup>44</sup>

However, after the old key is given up as permanently lost, and is replaced, it reappears in the storyteller's haversack in Jerusalem. The plot of the story would lack nothing without this incident. Yet the rediscovery of the key in Jerusalem is of central significance in the story. So if we accept S. Halkin's view, that "A Guest for the Night" is the central story in Agnon's writing from its very beginning to this day", <sup>45</sup> then the centre of this centre is the rediscovery of the key in Jerusalem.

Agnon goes into some detail when dealing with it:

"I saw that she was holding in her hand a large key which she had found in the slits of my haversack.... my wife handed me the key and I saw that it was not the one which the old locksmith had made for me, but it was the one which the old man of the house of learning had given to me on the Day of Atonement, before the closing service. I had searched for it a thousand times and despaired a thousand times and searched again a thousand times, and yet I had not found it .... almost certainly one day I had placed it in my bag and it slipped into one of the holes and out of my sight, or perhaps on the day when I put on my new coat, I took the key out of a summer garment and put it into a winter garment, and forgot about it." <sup>46</sup>

In describing so rationally and explaining so logically the disappearance and reappearance of the key, Agnon seems to break down an illusion which he had so carefully built up. The halo of mystery which surrounded the story, its teller, and all the secondary characters was due to a great extent to the riddle of the key. By explaining its absence so rationally, Agnon brings us down from the heights of mystery and mysticism to place us on the practical ground of reality.

Why does he do this?

Kurtzweil claims that the "frightening reappearance of 'the find' gives the key the standing of a great symbol" <sup>47</sup> He feels that the key symbolizes the "loss of the world of our fathers" because "here, in Jerusalem, the key cannot open the door to the old house of study". Moreover, he writes that in this story,

"... was raised in Agnon's writing, in the most concise and ingenious way, the basic problem of our new literature: the problem of tradition and the spiritual treasures of our nation in the past!" <sup>48</sup>

To my mind, Agnon's intention is different. By finding the original key to the old house of study, which had arrived in Eretz Yisrael in the natural way, without any mystery. Agnon wants to point to the way in which the life of Shebosh, and Buczacz can be continued in Jerusalem. By a natural aliyah, through seeing reality as it is in the glittering rays of the bright Jerusalem sun, in the light of the teller's failed attempt to renew the house of study in Shebosh, there is only one way - a future in Eretz Yisrael. This future must be established through actions, by rational means, without any reliance on miracles. <sup>49</sup>

S. Halkin sees the key in "A Guest for the Night" in a similar light:

"With all the importance of the key motif ... it is difficult to see how anyone could ignore the fact that neither the first key nor the second key are of principal importance ... what is of principal importance is that the house of study remains empty, and as barren as it was .... those who go there do it more from love of the hot stove, which they do not have in their houses and shops, and from

fear of the frost in home and shop than  
 from love of Torah and fear of Heaven.  
 ..... the feeling becomes stronger that the  
 past is no more, disappearing before his  
 very eyes .... the present has no course,  
 because many years of past are bound into  
 it. And the future? It is possible, he hints,  
 it is possible, but not here, only in Eretz  
Yisrael.<sup>50</sup>

This is implied very clearly by the key which is found, in a natural way, in Jerusalem.

In the chapter on "Chananya" we dealt with natural aliyah. We have pointed out that only Chananya, by virtue of his unique qualities, was able to ascend in a miraculous way. Nor is "Bilvav Yamim" the only story in which Agnon expresses his views on this matter. In 'The Goat's Tale',<sup>51</sup> Agnon once again reaffirms his faith in natural aliyah. In it, Agnon tells of a son of a sick Jewish man, who ties a rope to the tail of a goat and follows it until he reaches Eretz Yisrael. The son remains there, and the goat returns to its master and is slaughtered. The story closes with "from that day on, the cave's entrance is hidden, and there is no short way."

A careful reading will reveal Messianic connotations in 'The Goat's Tale'.<sup>52</sup>

In a most central part of the tale,<sup>53</sup> at the introduction to the letter in which he describes the Land, the son writes "from the corners of the earth I will sound songs..." This expression imbues the entire story with a Messianic atmosphere. In the Gemarah we read:

"The Holy One, Blessed be He, wished to make Chizkiayu the Messiah . . . . Came Midat Hadin (the letter of the law) before the Holy One, Blessed be He, and said: "Master of the Universe! David, King of Israel, who sang songs and praises before you, you did not make him a Messiah, and this Chizkiayu for whom you have done all these miracles and did not sing before you, him you will make a Messiah? . . . . Then the earth said: Master of the Universe, I will sing for you in the place of this Tzadik, so you may make him Messiah. Then she opened and sang before him, as is said (Isiah 24, 16) <sup>54</sup> From the corners of the earth we have heard songs."

The Messianic connection is clear beyond all doubt, and the Messianic hope concerned is the return to the land of the Patriarchs. In connection with this Agnon states "and there is no short way". The goat has been slaughtered, and because this has happened, one may no longer expect a miracle. <sup>55</sup>

In this story, Agnon repeats a motif familiar from Chananya's aliyah. The unique, miraculous aliyah of the elect is presented to contrast with the natural aliyah of the masses.

"Bilvav Yamim"

"The Tale of the Goat"

<u>Miraculous aliyah:</u>	Chananya	The son
<u>Natural aliyah:</u>	The <u>Nilbavim</u>	The others

This chapter has so far shown us that Agnon's ideal Jew:

1. Must go to live in Eretz Yisrael.
2. The aliyah must be in a natural way.

### LIFE IN ERETZ YISRAEL - IN WHAT MANNER?

Clearly, aliyah is not an aim in itself. It is a means to reaching Eretz Yisrael and living there. It is up to us then, to try to find out whether the topicality of Agnon's writing applies also to the style of life and its meaning and content in Eretz Yisrael. Did Agnon in any way, direct or indirect, hidden or revealed, express his opinion on this issue?

On dealing with this we must take care not to over simplify the author's statements. On the other hand, we may not absolve ourselves from discovering Agnon's stand on this complex matter.

Generally, Agnon conceives of life in Eretz Yisrael in the most practical and realistic manner. A precondition for absorption in the land is a realistic approach towards it. Only in the light of this approach can we understand the floundering and disappointment of the three old men in 'The Covenant of Love'.<sup>56</sup> Three old men sit by the sea of Jaffa, and tell of their disappointment from the fact that the Eretz Yisrael which they found upon arrival differs from the Eretz Yisrael which had existed in their minds throughout their lives:

"This Eretz Yisrael which appears to us is not of the standard which is spoken of in the Bible and in the words of our Sages, of Blessed memory ...."

The result is inevitable:

"I have lived here several months, despairing and sad and tortured with agony."

All this is a result of their unrealistic approach:

"when I think of the greatness of the qualities of Eretz Yisrael, that she is the ultimate Holiness of all holiness, and I was not privileged to gain even a smallest part of the smallest part of it ..."

The old men's unrealistic approach and the inevitable disappointment which follows it is very different from the sober, practical approach, and hence success, of the Nilbavim in 'Bilvav Yamim':

"Said R. Yudel Mendil the Chassid .... when I thought of going up to Eretz Yisrael I said to myself: why are people so afraid of going up to Eretz Yisrael? Is there no food and drink? Are the people there not like us? One who can live here can live there, for the Land was not given to the ministering angels, and why should I not go too? When Satan heard that he delayed me no more." 57

From the above, one may conclude that:

1. Eretz Yisrael must be approached realistically and
2. An unrealistic approach towards it is an "Act of Satan".

The reaction to the words of R. Yehuda Mendil the Chassid is in similar vein:

"Said R. Pesach the gabbai: This is precisely what I said to Tzirel, my wife. I said to her: What do you suppose, Tzirel, that the Land of Israel is made up of bits of paper on which holy names are inscribed? There, as well as here you will find houses to live in, and there as well as here fat soups are not made from the juice of Hoshana willows". 58

After such mental preparation, and with so realistic an approach, the Nilbavim's successful absorption is guaranteed, despite the difficulties still facing them.

"The Nilbavim accepted everything with love and did not kick against their suffering and did not complain against Heaven and tolerated all harm."<sup>59</sup>

The only one who is not absorbed is Leibush the butcher:

"From the beginning of his stay, Jerusalem did not please him. What he desired he did not find, and what he found did not satisfy him."<sup>60</sup>

It is natural and expected that he be disappointed with Jerusalem. During the conversation on the realistic approach towards Eretz Yisrael, it is Leibush the butcher who asks "if so, why do they make such a big issue from Eretz Yisrael?"<sup>61</sup> Because in his imagination it was "such a big issue", it was natural that his expectations not be fulfilled.

Clearly, then, those who express Agnon's opinion are the Nilbavim, and not the three old men in 'A Covenant of Love'. As we saw in the first chapter, Agnon journeys with the Nilbavim and he therefore identifies himself with their world view, while his approach to the three old men is critical. The phrase "their dry bones" in the opening section immediately sets the reader's attitude to them. In the light of Ezekiel's vision, the phrase has come to represent the antithesis of redemption. Their aliyah comes not from a desire to live in the Land but because "once they had become old, they left their superficial possessions". Their criticism of Eretz Yisrael is negative:



"Jaffa isn't Eretz Yisrael .... This old man knew that his fellow wasn't speaking of Jaffa alone, but said it only to lessen the bitterness in his heart. So he said: You say Jaffa isn't Eretz Yisrael. But is Eretz Yisrael itself Eretz Yisrael?"

Agnon's distaste for the three old men's attitude to Eretz Yisrael is expressed by usage of the phrase nima matza biyeshivato. This phrase is used by the gammara<sup>62</sup> in connection with the affair of the concubine on the Hill of Benjamin (Judges 19, 20) a mass rape which resulted in civil war in which the tribe of Benjamin was all but annihilated. This affair is one of the most sordid chapters in the annals of the Children of Israel, and a reference to it invokes all the sordidness of it.<sup>63</sup>

A certain reservation from excess naivette towards aliyah and Eretz Yisrael can be gleaned from 'Circles of Justice'. The subject matter here is dealt with very differently from the dealing with the old men in 'A Covenant of Love'. Agnon values and admires the old vinegar maker. The description of his longing for what he imagines to be Eretz Yisrael is very moving:

"Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known to you that all the calculations I make, I do so only in order to ascend to Your Holy Land. Take me up to there, and I will pray well there to you."

Yet one cannot ignore Agnon's criticism of his excess naivette:

"He was naive and did not know the purpose of this money box ...."

He placed his money in a box on a crucifix at a crossroads, and this artlessness prevented him from going up to Eretz Yisrael. True, he achieved complete purification, and his soul was taken to Eretz Yisrael after his death, but this aliyah is not the proper one in Agnon's opinion. He does not care for dead Olim not even those who died pure and innocent.

From all the above it emerges that Agnon demands from Olim a realistic approach to all aspects of life in Eretz Yisrael.

#### WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS

Agnon takes a stand on the relations between Jews and Arabs. Upon reading certain passages in his writings and applying modern definition to some of the phenomena which he describes, the reader will discover how up-to-date and practical Agnon's approach was to what may be termed "the problem of continuous security". The story teller is in his home town, Buczacz, following the destruction of his home by Arabs, and his journey to Buczacz for a visit. The hotelier, Mr. Bach, his daughter Erela and the story teller of 'A Guest for the Night' who is Agnon himself, are sitting and talking in the hotel. Starting with Mr. Bach's fears, for he had not received post from his father, who is in Ramat Rachel, the conversation turns to the question of security in Israel, and the question arises:

"Is that how things will carry on there for ever?"<sup>65</sup>

The same question using the same words has been asked throughout the history of the resettlement and nationhood of Israel, and is asked to this very day.

Moreover, the teller gives the word "hero" a definition which is not in the dictionary: "Who is a hero? One who is feared and none attacks him". This concept is the dominating one in the thoughts of Israel's military leaders, as in many other armies.

We read of another character, one who is not named, but is familiar:

"That wise man, his actions precede his wisdom. And while the majority of our wise men lived in the diaspora and preached sermons of Zionism, he went to Israel and did what cannot be done through speaking. He used to say "Do, and expect nothing". And because he did, his doings became a great being, as that is the way of actions: a man does a deed today and a deed tomorrow, after a while they add up to a great action."<sup>66</sup>

This is a "doer" in the most positive sense of the word, a pure man by the force of whose actions the nation is built. The same wise man whose actions precede his deeds also has a definite opinion on long range security, and he has the foresight to envisage the development of matters:

"There are three phases in the life of a nation. In the first, it is weak and light in the eyes of its neighbours who look upon it as though it isn't there. And because it is so base and abject, sometimes they pity it and do it grace, as one who is strong does with one who is weak. In the second phase, this nation arises from its lowness

and increases in strength. If its neighbours are wise, they make ties of friendship and brotherhood with it, so they benefit each other. And if they are not wise, they fail it whenever they can. Finally, they go to war with it. It stands on its own and takes on courage and strength, knowing that if it falls to its enemies, they will have no mercy. It is not afraid of the shattering of shields, nor of an abundance of soldiers. Once its neighbours see that, they make peace with it, and then they seek its proximity, and then they see it as an equal. First they become close for their own advantage, then for their mutual good, then they aid each other. Until now we were at the first phase of a lowly, base nation, now we have reached the second phase of a nation fortified and gaining strength, and our descendants will live to see the third phase as a nation like all other nations. And what will follow - no eye has seen it."

These three phases run parallel to the stages of development in 'From Foe to Friend'.<sup>67</sup> The teller, who tells the story in the first person, arrives in Talplot (a suburb of Jerusalem) with the intention of living there.<sup>68</sup> His enemy, the wind, discovers his weakness and blows his hat off. This is the first phase. The second is longer and composed of several stages, which symbolize the destructive treachery of the enemy and the settlements strengthening. First is the construction of the tent and its destruction, then comes the construction of the hut and its destruction, and this is followed by the building of the small house and its destruction.<sup>69</sup>

The gradual strengthening follows the enemy's resistance to acceptance of his existence. This is in accordance with reality which dictates certain facts of life; the more the enemy increases

its strength, the more we must increase our own strength.

Agnon expresses this concept with great practicality:

"It was impossible to return to Talpiyot, for the wind was driving me out. And to make a tent or a hut, for they have no existence, or to build me a small house, for that too could not withstand the wind. But why did it not withstand the wind? Because it was small and weak. Perhaps if it was big and strong, it might have stood. I took strong beams and walls and big stones and plaster and cement and I hired good workmen and I stood over them day and night.<sup>70</sup> My wisdom, too, stood me in good stead, for I deepened the foundations."

In other words: as the pressure from the outside increases, so it is necessary to become strengthened from the inside.

The construction of the large house does not complete the second phase. On the contrary, the story-teller is besieged within his home. His achievement is that the house, together with the fortified spirit of its dweller can withstand the siege and repel the foe's attacks. The battle is raging in all possible fierceness, but his spirit does not fall, "and is not afraid of the shattering of shields."<sup>71</sup> Compare this to " - the wind came and knocked upon the blinds."

After successfully withstanding continued siege and battle comes the third phase, which is predicted in the description of the "three phases" of a nation. "Once its neighbours see it, they make peace with it, and then they seek its proximity ...". In 'From Foe to Friend' it is expressed as "From that time on, the

spirit of the wind became lower, and it came respectfully ...", and the idyllic End of Days reigns between the neighbours.

That wise man whose "actions preceded his wisdom" spoke about the End of Days completing his description of the third phase with the words "no eye has seen it". This has a Messianic element:

"R. Chiya son of R. Abba said in the name of R. Yochanan: All the prophets prophesied only on the days of Messiah, but as for the world to come (Isiah) 'No eye has seen it except you, God' ..."<sup>72</sup>

Agnon is optimistic concerning the relations of the two nations.

However, peace and friendship between the neighbours will be attained not through self restraint and weakness, but through active self defence.<sup>73</sup>

From the passages quoted here it seems clear that Agnon did not recoil from dealing with themes which might be termed "topical". He spoke clearly and unequivocally on these matters, and from all the above, two further points of his outlook have emerged:

1. The approach to life in Eretz Yisrael must be realistic, and
2. The relations between our neighbours and ourselves must be based on active self defence.

#### BY WHAT RIGHT REDEMPTION?

At the beginning of the discussion on this topic, it would be beneficial to examine briefly another of Agnon's stories - Ad Hena (So Far)<sup>74</sup>. The author succinctly summarizes this rather long tale in its last page:

"Come and see how many exploits that man underwent. He was living in a barren room without sun and without light and without joy and could not find another dwelling, and then he got a letter from Dr. Levy's widow who wished to consult him about her late husband's books. So he journeyed to her and found her ill beyond cure, and returned from her dejected, and upon his return he had no place to rest his head, for the room which he had had, had been given to another. He went to seek another room, and found it but not for many days, for as soon as he found peace in it, he was forced to leave it. He was wandering from place to place and from room to room, each place and each room having their own troubles, and each trouble was fruitful and multiplied and gave birth to many troubles. When his troubles had increased so he could bear them no longer, God took pity on him and took him out and returned him to his place in Eretz Yisrael. You see, all that which befalls a man and is not in his favour, at the end it is for his good. Lest you think that these were all the kindnesses that were done to him, it must be said that a kindness was added to him, and which kindness was that? The kindness of a home, for in Eretz Yisrael he had a house. This man is not high headed, and he knows that not by virtue of himself did he gain a house, but by virtue of Dr. Levy's books, which needed a home."<sup>75</sup>

In this passage, as in the entire story, there are three chief participants: The story-teller, Dr. Levy's widow and Dr. Levy's books. In addition to these three, the story abounds with minor characters, most of whom are from Gentile Germany of the period of the First World War. The characters are all realistically described, breathing the story's atmosphere and functioning within it normally, yet this story is clearly an allegory.

Who is this Dr. Levy? Who is his widow, who is "ill beyond hope of cure"? And who is the story-teller, who "was wandering from place to place and from room to room, each place and each room having their own troubles .... When his troubles had increased .... God took pity on him .... and returned him to his place in Eretz Yisrael"?

What are those books of the late Dr. Levy which entitled the story-teller to a house in Eretz Yisrael?

Clearly, more than treating the tribulations of one Jew who lives among the Gentiles, Agnon is in fact dealing with the people of Israel, exiled among the other nations. All the story-teller's wandering, troubles and problems are not only his but of the entire Jewish people, "each place and each room having their own troubles."

The story will take on added meaning when taking into account that "Ad Hena" was written in 1952, during the State of Israel's first years of independence, and less than a decade after the Holocaust: "When his troubles increased so he could bear them no longer, God took pity on him and returned him to his place in Eretz Yisrael". This is obviously a reference to the Jewish people's long exile, the horrors of the Holocaust and to the establishment of the State of Israel.<sup>76</sup>

This leads to an identification of Dr. Levy. It would be correct to see him as Moses.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Dr. Levy does not play a prominent role in the story, but his widow and his books are central. His widow - the Jewish people - is very ill, "Ill beyond hope of



cure". Yet even in the time of her illness, she thinks of her husband's books and worries about their well being. At one stage, she wishes to sell them, but does not succeed. She then makes contact with the story-teller, that is, the various parts of the Jewish people assist each other in organizing the return home. Surely this is a reference to the organisation of the Zionist movement. Does the description of Dr. Levy's widow's illness and her wonderous recovery not constitute a declaration that the Jewish people must initial, must control their own fate, and not listen to doctors "who desire her good", those nations who hinder every step?

A rereading of the description of the illness of Dr. Levy's widow and her recovery will show that this passage may be read only as an allegory:

"But that woman of whom all had despaired, miraculous miracles happened to her. She regained her health, as she had before she took ill, and moreover, her strength doubled and she increased force, and she is healthier than all the doctors who had treated her, even that young doctor whom I had found by her in the hospital. Now in this generation miracles are not easy to come by, so how do I say that miraculous miracles happened to her? Well, I was using superlative language, and everything that happened to her happened in a natural way.<sup>78</sup> How? One day she felt that the bandage with which the doctors had dressed her were oppressing her. She asked for them to be loosened, so they became frightened and they said to her "Heaven forbid, any lossening might bring her to her end". So not only did they not loosen them but they tightened them and added upon them. These

bandages were pressing and taking her breath away. So she put her finger between them to relieve them somewhat. Once she put her finger, they broke. Once they broke, she was somewhat relieved. She continued to break them until all broke. Once she had broken them all, her spirit began to return to her and she awakened and her eyes opened and she saw herself lying in a hospital bed, covered in cushions and blankets and divided from other people and separated by a curtain and bottles upon bottles of doctors' drugs surrounding her and hiding the sunlight from her. She removed some and threw some out. And still, wearers of white whispered about her and said, "her end is approaching, her end is come." When she spread her arms she saw that she controls her limbs. She stretched herself and tried to stand up from her bed. Once she tried to stand - she stood. Immediately she commanded the servants of the hospital to bring her her dresses. They had not the strength to oppose her, so they went and brought them. Once she had put on her own clothes the radiance of her face returned and she became once again what she was before they had put her into the hospital, and she began to return to her dealings, to do all that she had to do." <sup>79</sup>

This passage speaks for itself. Each idea, each sentence and even each word express a certain stage in Agnon's concept of the process of redemption. Agnon even troubles to explain that the 'miraculous miracles which happen to her' were just superlative language, and that 'everything that happened to her happened in a natural way' Her redemption comes from breaking her bandages - chains with her own hands. At first she hesitates <sup>79</sup>, but as she progresses in the breaking of the bandages, she gains self confidence and does it with greater ease.

Even during her recovery "wearers of white whispered about her and said: 'her end is approaching, her end is come'". During the recovery of the Jewish settlement in Israel, other parts of the Jewish people, European Jewery, were in grave danger. Yet the wearers of white, the composers of 'White Papers' stood on the side, satisfied with predicting the approaching end, rejoicing at their misfortune. This whispering continued even when the threat of danger ceased to be a threat and became a very real danger. There, too, no one did anything to save "Dr. Levy's widow".

It seemed that the young doctor represents the British mandatory government.<sup>80</sup> Britian was 'young' in her relations with Eretz Yisrael, especially when compared with the extended Ottoman regime which preceded the British Mandate.

Many hopes were placed upon the 'young doctor ', but he, too, disappointed. There is almost a self satisfied smugness in Agnon's statement that "she is healthier than all the doctors who had treated her, even that young doctor whom I had found by her in the hospital".

After telling of the widow's recovery and of the story-teller's wandering and after "God took pity on him and took him out and returned him to his place in Eretz Yisrael", Agnon states one of the principles of his personal philosophy. "This man is not high headed, and he knows that not by virtue of Dr. Levy's books, which need a home. That is, there is a reason and an aim for the ingathering of the exiles and for our return to the Land, and that is

"I said . . . . you saw and you know what you saw . . . it would be good for the people of Israel to keep their Torah, particularly here in the land of which it was said 'and you shall dwell in it and inherit it and take care to fulfill all the commandments . . . Dwelling in Eretz Yisrael is great, for it is weighed against all other mitzvot in the Torah. Here I am going to bring these saplings on my shoulder to plant them in our earth . . . . the Holy One, Blessed be He, made his planting dependent on our planting. If we carry out our planting, then it is certain that the Holy One, Blessed be He, his planting will be also be maintained . . . We received this land from His hand, Blessed be He, not to take over the government, nor did we come to rule it but to plough and to sow and to plant, so we may obey His laws and treasure His teachings.'" 85

In evaluating the story and particularly its conclusion, D. Sadan notices the connection between the nation and its land:

"It is not necessary to labour excessively to see the real connection between the nation and its land, a connection which feeds upon a meta-historical element and is realized in a historical element, in the same way that it is not necessary to labour excessively to see how immaterial this connection is if it is not bound to the field of the nation's rootedness in its land." 86

All this is true. The connection between nation and land is clear. But there is another aspect which must be noted, as it appears at the story's summary. It is not necessary to labour excessively to see that Agnon sees the connection between nation and land as being more than physical or nostalgic. The additional aspect is the connection between nation, its land and its Torah. 87 Moreover, the purpose of the connection between nation and land is to make possible the connection between nation and Torah - "we

come .... to plough and to sow and to plant, so we may obey His laws and treasure His teachings."

Incidentally, the repeated references to the planting serves in itself as an answer to the Yishmaelite minister's question - "whose is this land and ... who will have the government in it?" In Tractate Sanhedrin, the gemmarah deals with calculators of the coming of Messiah, to who the attitude is usually negative - "Cursed be the spirit of the Calculators of the coming of the Messiah, who would say, once the time for the coming of the Messiah has passed and he has not come, he will not come any more."<sup>88</sup> Here the gemmarah is dealing with those who calculate the end of days from segments of verses and disconnected phrases. However, there is a positive attitude towards "intercepting" hints concerning the coming of the Messiah: "There is no end more revealed than that one, for it was said (Ezekiel) But ye, oh mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people of Israel."<sup>89</sup> Rashi interprets: when Eretz Yisrael will give its fruit bounteously then the end of days is near and there is no end more revealed than that". By the very fact that the teller of our story is planting trees in Eretz Yisrael, he is not only speaking of the coming of the Messiah but is bringing the end of days with his his own actions. This serves as an indisputable answer to the Yishmaelite minister's question.

During the argument he has with Yerucham Chofshi, who has emigrated from Eretz Yisrael, the story-teller of 'A Guest for the Night' says:

"You seeked in the land not what our forefathers seeked in it nor what the books tell of it nor the land as it is, but a land as you demand it, and for this reason the land could not carry you. A land which the Lord your God seeks all the days, not as you seek it and not as your fellows seek it, but as the Lord your God seeks it." <sup>90</sup>

Finally, let us note the words of the Jerusalemite wise man, who is identical with Agnon, who says:

"We have nothing left but the Torah, and it is by right of it that we live and by right of it that we are destined to be redeemed." <sup>91</sup>

At this stage, two points may be added to those of Agnon's ideals concerning Eretz Yisrael already mentioned:

1. The redemption of the Jewish people must come through their own initiative, without outside help, and even in opposition to the nations' opinion and will, and
2. Life in Eretz Yisrael must be "as the Lord your God seeks it".

The execution of these two points, as of those preceding them, is not easy. A great deal of willpower, determination, and consistency are necessary for their continuous fulfillment. There is a need for a steady and strong willed struggle. This struggle is one of the more central points of Agnon's writing, and before concluding this chapter, we will bring certain quotations in connection with it.

Agnon saw himself as a pupil of Maimonides. In his speech after receiving the Nobel Prize he spoke of the influences upon him and said:

"First and foremost were the holy books, from whom I learnt to link letters .... after them the Rabbinic writings and our holy poets and the learned men of the middle ages, and at their head our master, Maimonides, of blessed memory."<sup>92</sup>

It seems to me that we must therefore examine Agnon's attitude to redemption in the light of Maimonides' approach. In principle Maimonides accepts Shmuel the Amora's opinion that "The only difference between this world and Messianic days is subjection to alien kingdoms"<sup>93</sup> Maimonides quotes Shmuel<sup>94</sup> and adds:

"And do not think that the Messiah must do miracles and wonders and renew things in this world or bring the dead back to life and other such like. It is not so, for R. Akiva was a great wise man, of the wise men of the mishna, and he aided the King BenKuziba (Bar Kochba-M.Y.H.) and he said of him that he is King Messiah. He and all the contemporary sages thought that he is King Messiah, until he died for sins. When he died, they knew that he is not the Messiah. But at first, wise men asked him for neither sign nor proof."<sup>95</sup>

Moreover, Agnon gained his teaching, encouraging, "get up and do and expect nothing" approach from Maimonides. We read in the gemmarah that "King Chizkiyahu did six things .... and he concealed the book of cures .... and they thanked him for it."<sup>96</sup> (The sages agreed with him -M.Y.H.) In his interpretation of the mishna, Maimonides explains that and adds:

I have dwelt upon this for so I heard and so was the matter explained to me, that Solomon composed a book of cures. When any man fell ill or one of the diseases befell him, he would do as the book instructed him, and was cured. When Chizkiyaha saw that men were not relying on God, Blessed be He,

he removed the book and concealed it. And now see how that statement lacks and how it errs.. How could they attribute such stupidity to Chizkiyahu and his sages, who agreed with him, which cannot even be attributed to the simple masses! According to their weightless and distorted logic, if a person is hungry and goes and eats bread, he would no doubt be cured of that severe ill, the ill of hunger. Yet would we say that he has despaired and no longer relies on his God? We say to them: Oh foolish ones! In the same way that we thank God when eating for providing me with that which satisfies me and removes hunger, and I live and am sustained, so I thank him for providing me with a cure to cure my illness when I am cured from it. I dwelled on this matter only because it is so well known."

More from Maimonides:

"And know, my friends, that it is a basic principle of our faith and all the philosophers accept it that all actions of a man are in his own hands, and there is no coerser." 97

Maimonides advises: Act! Dò! If this is applicable to hunger and disease, it is to be applied, also, to redemption, as it witnessed from his words in Hayad Hachazaka.

The greatness of man lies in his being a free agent, able to decide to act, able to decide to choose the good and the positive. If this is true of all men, it is even more true of a Jew, and if it applies to all Jews, it applies even more to those who go to Eretz Yisrael and live in it.



## REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "SHAI AGNON'S ERETZ YISRAEL"

1. Hechacham HaYerushalmi, in Pesher Agnon, p. 50-61.
2. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 414 - 467
3. M. Tochner: Pesher Agnon p. 59
4. ibid. p. 197 - 198
5. Y. Keshet: Pirkei Agnon, Havdalot p. 88-89
6. From Ido and Inam, in Ad Henah, p. 343
7. M. Tochner: Pesher Agnon p. 50
8. True, not always can one prove the identity of a particular character who expresses a certain view and the author, as Tochner did in connection with the Jerusalemite wise man, or in the case of R. Shmuel Yosef son of R. Shalom Mordechai Halevi, one of the Olim in "Bilvav Yamim". However, an opinion expressed by a "positive" character may be accepted as circumstantial evidence in discovering the author's view on the matter under investigation.
9. Often, Agnon uses the "triangle" formula to reveal one of his characters in a positive light, and sometimes the absence of one of the sides of the "triangle" implies Agnon's negation of the particular character described.
10. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 345
11. ibid. p. 347
12. ibid. p. 106
13. ibid. p. 290
14. ibid. p. 469 - 470
15. "A Guest for the Night" p. 20
16. ibid. p. 442

17. Etzel Chemdat, in Samuch Ve'nire p. 45-77
18. ibid. p. 66
19. ibid. p. 73
20. ibid. p. 77
21. ibid. p. 75
22. It has become almost axiomatic in the reading of Agnon, and is claimed, among others by:
  1. A. Band, Hachet Ve-Onsho BiTmol Shilshom, in Molad Iyar-Sivan 5727, p. 77
  2. E. Ben-Ezer: Haze-evim Vehakevasim, in Moznayim, Adar A. 5733, p. 170
  3. A.M. Lifshitz, Shai Agnon, in Ketavim p. 215
  4. Y. Keshet: Leyovel HaShiv-im Shel Shai Agnon in Moznayim, Av-Elul 5718, p.225
  5. S.Y. Pneuli, Yetzirato Shel Shai Agnon, p. 159
  6. Gila Ramraz-Roach, Shira-Acharit Davar, in Moznayim, Adar 5733, p. 182
23. Elu Ve'Elu p. 394-402
24. Agadat Hasofer (the Scribes Legend) in Elu Ve'Elu p. 131-145

In this story, Agnon describes the pure relations between husband and wife. The two halves of the room - that which serves for writing holy books, and the other, serving for everyday life, are united by the board on which are holy books. Everything is united to fulfill "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof ..... God is before me always". By means of their pure lives, Refael the Scribe and his wife Miriam raise the material to high levels of sanctity, and reach unity with their Maker - the bridal gown becomes a curtain for the Torah ark.

A.M. Lifshitz (Ketavim, p. 215) identifies Refael the Scribe with Agnon the writer. According to this, Refael becomes Agnon's spokesman.

25. Elu Ve'Elu p. 133
26. ibid. p. 136
27. ibid. p. 144
28. "The Bridal Canopy" p. 418 - 467
29. See M. Tochner: Pesher Agnon p. 50-61
30. See "The Bridal Canopy" p. 416
31. Rabinowitz, Shorashim Umegamot, p. 267
32. ibid. p. 285
33. This subject was dealt with in "Chananya". Here, the problem will be dealt with more widely, by extension of the time dealt with, and by addition of further topics.
34. It is interesting to note that even in the period preceeding the Zionist aliyah, in the days of "The Bridal Canopy", "Hanidach", "Bilvav Yamim" and others, Agnon refrains almost completely from touching upon the problems of Enlightenment and assimilation. Characters like the enlightened and assimilated Heshel, who learns Torah in "The Bridal Canopy" are the exception rather than the rule. He does not evade condemning and describing that which is in the ranks and deserves criticism, but he consistently avoids any contact with those who defected from the ranks by assimilation. True, in "Tmol Shilshom" he says "There is another strife, that between the assimilationists and the Zionists. These desire to be like all the other nations, while the others desire to be Jews" (p. 12) but by this short mention, he has done his duty of dealing with this topic, and he leaves it at that.

35. "Tmol Shilshom" p. 12
36. Bilvav Yamim, in Elu Ve'Elu p. 493
37. Bine-areinu Uvizkeneinu in Al Kapot Haman-ul p. 346
38. Psalms, 3,7
39. "Tmol Shilshom" p. 20

Agnon seems to be expressing his opinion about those parts of the Chassidic movement which do not take a positive approach to Eretz Yisrael, though they do not oppose aliyah. "R. Yehuda Mendil was of the Chassidim of the Rabbi R. Uriel, his soul in the treasures of heaven . . . . When he died, the whole world was as nothing to him until God put it on his heart to go up to Eretz Yisrael" (Elu Ve'Elu, p. 490) In Levav Ehosh (Elu Ve'Elu p. 432-440): "After the death of R. Hirsch, Simcha Baruch wandered far and wide in search of a rabbi . . . . the Holy One, Blessed be He, put a good thought in Simcha Baruch's heart - to ascend to Eretz Yisrael." There is a slight jeer in this - the Chassidim go to Eretz Yisrael only after the rabbi's death. The Rabbi while alive has, therefore, a negative influence on their aliyah.

40. "A Guest for the Night", p. 170 See also Agnon's description of Zionism's opposers in Ad Henah, p. 157
41. The brackets are Agnon's
42. "A Guest for the Night" p. 159
43. Gittin 56,1
44. Among them:
  1. S. Kramer: Shai Agnon - Realism Ushvirato p. 132
  2. B. Kurtzweil: Masot p. 54 ff.
  3. S.Y. Pnueli: Yetzirato shel Shai Agnon p. 102

45. Al Oreach Nata Lalun, in LeAgnon Shai p. 91
46. 'A Guest for the Night' p. 439 - 440
47. B. Kurtzweil, Masot p. 50
48. ibid. p. 68
49. It is difficult to accept Kurtzweil's generalizing attitude, which sees Agnon as a poet of the past only: "In spite of his artistic attempt to freeze time, he knows, and his writing gives evidence of his knowing, that time will gain control. True, his stories tell of the world of the past with affection and appreciation, but with a view to parting". (Masot, p 12) On the contrary, Agnon's approach is very sober, and with the disappearance of a past which he has treated realistically, he points the way to a future better and more perfect than the past.
50. S. Halkin: Al Oreach Nata Lalun, in LeAgnon Shai, p. 109-112.
51. Elu Ve'Elu p. 373-375
52. Yoav Elshtein tries to prove that in 'The Goats Tale', Agnon is in fact describing the reality of 16th Century Zafed. (Igulim Vayosher p. 118-130)
53. Elshtein divides the story into five main chapters:
  1. Background and discussion between father and son on the milk's source.
  2. The son's following the goat through the cave.
  3. Description of the Land.
  4. Shabbat. The goat returns alone, bearing the letter to the father.
  5. The father's lamentation for his son, slaughter of the goat and conclusion.

54. Sanhedrin 94,1

Following the story's language and in the light of the association with the sources, it is worth noting a further motif: The father "was shouting and crying and weeping: my son, my son, where are you? My son, would that I had died in your place, my son, my son". These words originate from Samuel II, 18, 33 and 19, 4. Part of David's lamentation for his dead son Absalom. The gammarah explains: "Where for these eight 'my son' ? Seven for raising him from the seven circles of hell, and one for bringing him into heaven" (Sotta, 10,1) That is the son gains entry into Heaven. The sentence "An evil beast has devoured him, my son has been devoured. And he refused to be comforted, and he said: I will go down to the grave unto my son mourning." Is taken directly from Jacob's lamentation for Joseph (Genesis 37, 33-35). Rashi says "... meaning hell. It was given to me that if none of my sons dies in my lifetime, I will not go down to Hell," - and now that Joseph has died, I will go down to hell. That is to say, the father goes down to hell. The implication for the story is clear. The son, living in Eretz Yisrael, gains Heaven, while the father, living in the diaspora, is destined to hell.

55. The goat, too, mootes miraculous connotations. "R. Chanina Son of Dosa had goats. They said to him: Your goats cause damage. He said to them: If they cause damage, let bears eat them, and if not, each one shall bring a bear in her horns at evening. That evening, each one brought a bear in her horns." (See Ta-anit 25,1 Ketubot 111,2).
56. Elu Ve'Elu p. 429-432
57. ibid. p. 522. "Eretz Yisrael was not given to eaters of Mannah" Tmol Shilshom p. 454.
58. Elu Ve'Elu p. 522

59.    ibid. p. 548    This is in contrast with Tochner's view. He sees the three old men's approach as representing religious Jewry and claims that "The double standards applying to Eretz Yisrael, even among the God fearing, is defined most clearly in 'A Covenant of Love' ... while the words of the third old man, despite their laconic emphasis, are an expression of Agnon's ideological floundering, whose meaning concerning the confrontation between Eretz Yisrael and Diaspora, and the value of Eretz Yisrael today, are of crucial importance". Likewise, it is difficult to accept Tochner's approach to the hardship which was the lot of the Nilbavim and which he sees as having "an ironic connection to Eretz Yisrael, which involves a meeting with its reality". (Pesher Agnon, p. 56)
60.    Elu Ve'Elu p. 549
61.    ibid. p. 522
62.    Gittin, 6,2
63.    From the general tone of the story one may deduct disassociation from the custom, prevalent among certain circles, of going to Eretz Yisrael with the specific intention of dying and being buried there.
64.    Elu Ve'Elu p. 383-388
65.    'A Guest for the Night' p. 235
66.    ibid.
67.    Elu Ve'Elu p. 480-482. See also Im Atzmi in Ha-esh Veha-etzim, p. 307
68.    The phrase "and the land is large" used in this story is from Judges, 18,10 and is used to describe the settling of the tribe of Dan.

69. Y. Mark feels that the destruction of the small house from the inside is reminiscent of "the bravery of Trumpeldor and his fellows at Tel-Chai, when the Arab gangs entered the yard shrewdly, and forced the pioneers to leave the place". 'Me-Oyev Le-Ohev' Le Shai Agnon in Bisdeh Chemed, Tevet 5727, p. 223.
70. This is reminiscent of the phrase "And the night will be a guard to us, and labour by day". (Nechemia, 4,22) quoted often in pre-statehood days. In those days, as in biblical times, the phrase was used in connection with rebuilding the Land.
- Note the pun. The phrase "shattering the shields" also means in Hebrew "shutting the blinds securely".
71. 'A Guest for the Night' p. 236
72. Sanhedrin 99,1
73. See D. Sadan: Al Shai Agnon pp. 109-114, and also E. Ben-Ezer 'Haze-evim Vehakevasim', in Moznayim, Adar A 5733 pp. 168-176.
74. Ad Hena, p. 5-170
75. *ibid.* p. 169 The quotations following are on p. 167-170
76. This is in keeping with the many Talmudic and Midrashic sayings which deal with the suffering preceding the coming of the Messiah ("Pangs of Messiah").
77. This is in keeping with B. Kurtzweils mode of interpretation. He identifies Dr. Yekuti'el Ne-eman with Moses. See Hakdama Le'Sefer Hama-asim', in Masot, p. 74-85. Also G. Ramraz Rauch: 'Shira' - Acharit Davar, in Moznayim, Adar A 5733 p. 180.
78. This is in keeping with the idea mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that Agnon sees natural redemption as miraculous, for it is the fulfillment of the prophecies of solace which our prophets prophesied in the past - the miracle of Messianic days.
79. 'Ad Hena' pp. 167-168 R. Chiyah the Great and R. Shimon son of Chalafta were walking in the Valley of Arbel when they saw the morning star rising. R. Chiyah the Great



said to R. Shimon: 'Rabbi, such is the redemption of Israel. At first it is small, and then the more it grows the more it gains strength to grow'"  
Yerushalmi, Berachot 1,1

80. There is no need to query the chronology of the tale. Though Agnon is describing the period of World War One, he uses minor figures from a preceding generation which suit the deeper levels of the story.
81. Elu Ve'Elu p. 449 - 461
82. Dov Sadan proves that he is identical with Agnon.  
Al Shai Agnon p. 114-120
83. Elu Ve'Elu p. 450
84. ibid. p. 460
85. ibid. p. 460-461
86. D. Sadan: Al Shai Agnon p. 120
87. "According to this approach, the secular doing of the non-religious Jews in Israel is also a religious revelation, if it is intended for the building of the country and its habitation. Therefore any Jew may fall within the definition of the Ishmaelite minister, who recognizes only the right of observant Jews to Eretz Yisrael." Ehud ben Ezer in Moznayim, Adar 5733, p. 171-172
88. Sanhedrin 97,2
89. ibid. 98,1
90. 'A Guest for the Night' p. 90
91. 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 416
92. See also: D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 91  
Shai Agnon, Yemey Yalduti, in Molad, Kisler 5720.  
Shai Agnon, Bachanuto Shel Mar Lublin, p. 40-41.
93. Brachot 34,2

94. Hayad Hachazaka, Hilchot Melachim 12,2
95. ibid. 11,3
96. Pesachim 56,1
97. Igrot HaRambam, part II, p. 26

CHAPTER TEN

YITZCHAK KUMMER'S SIN

## YITZCHAK KUMMER'S SIN

Now that we have before us all the points which Agnon sees as essential for a Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael, we can see that which is common to them is that they all demand activity, a will to action, a sense of direction, the ability to decide, consistency and dedication.

In attempting to give reason for Yitzchak Kummer's death, we must examine his actions closely, as well as his attitude to various aspects of his acclimatization, his dreams and hopes, and the attempts he makes, - if at all, - to overcome any problems. Yitzchak must be seen in view of his relationships with those surrounding him: Men, women, animals, organizations, societies, communities and others.

We must examine Yitzchak in relation to those points which Agnon stated to be essential for the existence of Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael. Did he measure up to those points? Was he interested in doing so? Did his character enable him to relate to them, to struggle with them?

It is not necessary to examine each point in relation to Yitzchak - seeing him in relation to the common denominator of those points will suffice. In order to appreciate a work of art, one must look at it in its entirety, for dwelling upon each detail detracts from the overall value. Hence, we will view 'Tmol Shilshom', and Yitzchak's actions within it, as one complete, all encompassing unit.

In order to do this, Yitzchak's history, from his birth through to his death, must be followed.

A thorough reading of the novel will convince its reader that Yitzchak is illustrated as being extremely passive. That in itself is not new and is commonly accepted. However, in this work we will attempt to take this, two steps further. Firstly, we will go through the single events in Yitzchak Kummer's life, investigate each one separately and then form a complete picture from them. We will then attempt an interpretation of the complete picture, and of its meaning and significance, which transcend the novel.

At first, let it be said that Yitzchak was not merely entirely passive, but he was far more - or less- than that: He lacked all initiative. He did nothing. Things happened to him without him having anything to do with their initiation or their outcome.<sup>1</sup> Now follows a list of those things.

1. Yitzchak's aliyah. It would seem as though he gained his father's consent to his aliyah through his perseverance in wanting it:

"From the day when he was born, nothing was done according to his will, until that came along and was done according to his will".<sup>2</sup>

However, this is not really the case. The true reason for his father's agreement is that:

"By and by, Yitzchak's time to serve in the army had come, and there was no reason to exempt him: He was a healthy young man and he had no money to bribe the officers in charge. The army means desecrating the Sabbath and eating forbidden foods, and so without any choice, Shimon had to reconsider the proposed journey".<sup>3</sup>

That is to say, Yitzchak's aliyah was an escape from serving in the army, and in any case it was not a result of his determination but a result of his father's fears.

2. Generally, a man chooses his profession. To show how little Yitzchak was involved in the choice of his profession, we see him sleeping when the profession literally comes to him:

"Sleep came upon him and he dozed, and when he awoke he saw an old man standing beside him, and he had a green bowl, with a paint-brush in it, in his hand. The old man said to him: "Take the instruments and do your duty".<sup>4</sup>

Even that from which he is destined to earn his livelihood for the remainder of his days come to him in passivity, for what could be more passive than sleep?

3. Even in such a major issue as a neglect of positive commandments and a transgression of negative ones, he is carried along by the general trend, without justifying his deeds, even to himself:

"He did not do this thing from excess thoughts on faith and religion, but because he was living among people who had reached an awareness that religion etc., was not important, and because they saw no need for religion, they saw no need for its commandments ... an inkling of an idea came to Yitzchak without his knowing it, a dim idea which had not reached clarification". <sup>5</sup>

Note: Those with whom Yitzchak was living "had come to an awareness". Yitzchak, on the other hand, is almost totally unaware. He had merely:

- i) An inkling of an idea, and it came to him
- ii) without his knowing it
- iii) a dim idea
- iv) which had not reached clarification.

This is a very sharp contrast between Yitzchak, who is swept along, and his "aware" friends.

4. Sonya, too, comes to Yitzchak unintentionally. It is sufficient to read of their return from the boat, after escorting Rabinowitz, to see that the initiator of their relationship was Sonya in her coquettishness. Her coquetry traps the young man from Galicia who says of himself: "I have never in my life conversed with a woman other than my mother and sisters". <sup>6</sup>

"Sonya shook her dress and straightened its pleats ... she put one foot on a shoe-shine box and lifted the edges of her dress". <sup>7</sup>

Busying herself with the dress and its edges in the presence of the naive young man is the presentation of an erotic challenge as well as excess attention on her part to Yitzchak. Finally, "Sonya rejoiced when she found Yitzchak".<sup>7</sup> That is, it was not Yitzchak who found Sonya, but Sonya who found Yitzchak. She is the initiator during their entire relationship, and he merely cooperates.<sup>8</sup>

5. His going up to Jerusalem is not a result of strong determination:

"Suddenly the screeching of the train was heard. Yitzchak awoke and pondered, well, the train from Jerusalem has arrived already .... and he was amazed at himself that in all the years he had been living in Eretz Yisrael, he had never once gone up to Jerusalem".<sup>9</sup>

"Yitzchak wished many times to go up to Jerusalem and he never went".<sup>10</sup>

and only after Sonya's provocation, that:

"Anyone in whose veins runs blood and not painters' water, goes and sees".<sup>11</sup>

does he decide to go up to Jerusalem.:

"In those days Yitzchak was of two minds he wanted to go up to Jerusalem and he wanted to remain in Jaffa".<sup>12</sup>

6. Upon arriving in Jerusalem:

"A wagoner came and took his luggage. Yitzchak dragged along behind him and got onto the cart.



He wished to go to Rabinowitz's hostel.

"Which Rabinowitz do you want? Yitzchak said, 'I have forgotten to which one I was told to go'." 14

Eventually he stays with Tfilinsky, for no other reason than the wagoner suggested it:

"He said to him "If you want my advice, go to neither this one nor that one, but to Shoe Herscher Tfilinsky". Yitzchak said, "If so, take me to Tfilinsky"." 15

7. His return to fulfilling the commandments comes almost unwittingly, through sheer imitation:

"When his fellow painters break from work and pray, he too lays down his work and prays. And when they eat bread together, he joins their grace after the meal". 16

The same is true of his "assimilation" among the Jerusalem-ites: In that, too, he is not a master of his fate.

"If not for Blaukopf the artist, Yitzchak would have become a complete Jerusalemite". 17

The same is true of laying phylectaries: "and they handed him phylectaries". 18

8. Agnon describes Yitzchak as the ultimate dull person:

"This Yitzchak did not impress his fellows ... He is not distinguished in appearance in conversation. You chance to speak with him, you are not eager to speak with him again .... A fellow like Yitzchak, whoever does not like him sees him as though he is not there". 19

9. The same is true of his return to Jaffa, to Sonya's Jaffa:

"It came to him that he must go down to Jaffa. But because he was not certain what he desired there, his soul jeered at him ... and he was therefore afraid of showing himself before Sonya and so he left the matter undecided".<sup>20</sup>

10. His arrival at Shifra's home is accidental.<sup>21</sup>

11. His journey to Jaffa is accompanied by wavering:

"Suddenly his heart was pressed as one who has to go on a pressing journey. 'Why must I go and where must I go' Yitzchak asked himself .... And until he answered his question, he set his mind from the journey".<sup>22</sup>

"When he intended to go to Jaffa, it was the anniversary of his mother's death, so he postponed his journey and went to say 'Kaddish' ".<sup>23</sup>

Yitzchak knows well that upon his return to Jaffa he will have to meet Sonya face to face and clarify their relations. This is beyond his power, and so he uses every possible opportunity and excuse to postpone his journey. When he eventually goes, it is as in a trance.<sup>24</sup>

12. "Yitzchak went down to Jaffa to speak with Sonya. Having spoken with her he might have returned to Jerusalem. But people like Yitzchak, when they embark on so long a journey as from Jerusalem to Jaffa, do not return immediately. And even if it is their intention to return immediately, they find excuses and they procrastinate".<sup>25</sup>

"I will dine first, and then I will consider the matter of my return to Jerusalem". 26

13. His relationship with Shifra is of a similar vein:

"Yitzchak thought to himself 'while I am enjoying myself here, Shifra is alone and lonely'. He took it upon himself to return to Jerusalem promptly after the Sabbath. But any trip which is planned on the Sabbath is not carried out, and this is true of his trip. He had planned to go immediately after the Sabbath, and the Sabbath went out and he did not go". 27

Arriving in Jerusalem will mean facing Shifra and facing facts and added responsibilities, all of which he puts off as much as he can.

14. He informs his father of so important an event as his engagement to Shifra merely because he chanced to find writing material when he was not otherwise occupied:

"Yitzchak remained in the eating room as one whose business forces him to spend a night at an hotel and he does not know what to do with himself. He saw a pen and ink lying on the window sill, so he said to himself 'I'll sit down and write a letter to father' ". 28

15. And the supreme vacillation:

"Yitzchak went out to rent a room for himself... when he neared the house, he returned. So once, twice, thrice. For he had already decided to change his dwelling, and he was afraid that the room is vacant and he will be tempted to return there". 29

16. "Yitzchak laid down his paintbrush and took the jug and washed his hands and shut his eyes and began saying "Ashrei". While he was praying he asked himself 'Did I intend to pray?' ". 30
17. "Yitzchak seems like a tree with few roots, and each wind uproots him and upturns him. But if we watch his actions closely we see that it is not so ... Finally he becomes as a tree with many roots, that even if all the winds in the world came upon him, they do not move him". 31

This seems like evidence of Yitzchak's sturdy, stable and consistent character, but it is followed closely by a description of his inability to face reality as it is:

"That which did not appeal to him, he would remove from before his eyes, while he dwelled upon those things which appealed to him".

He removes from his consciousness that which is beyond his power, and by ignoring problems, he deludes himself that he has solved them.

18. To conclude, let us return to one of the most central events of the novel - writing on the dog:

"Yitzchak picked up one of his paintbrushes, and he did not know if he intended to threaten the dog with it or to wipe it on its skin ... Yitzchak's arm became outstretched and his hand began to quiver ... He wrote a few letters on it. We do not know whether from the start he had intended to write what he wrote, or whether only at the end it seems to him that he wrote with intention .... Yitzchak saw the dog, and it was standing and looking at him. He said to it: 'what more do you want?' The dog wagged its tail and barked a pleading kind of bark .... Yitzchak's

hand began to itch, as that of an artisan prior to his work. He rubbed it on his garment, to be rid of the itch, but the itch was becoming stronger". 32

Here again, we are confronted with Yitzchak's hesitation and passivity. 'His arm became outstretched' - the Hebrew grammatic construction is proof of passivity. Throughout the passage, Yitzchak is a non-initiator. The dog begs for the writing on his skin, and Yitzchak responds, somewhat unwillingly, to the dog's mute request. He tries not to respond - "He rubbed it on his garment, to be rid of the itch" - but fails even in his attempted resistance. Even the will of a stray dog is stronger than Yitzchak's will, because Yitzchak has no will, no stand, no world view. He is carried and moved from place to place, from situation to situation, from girl to girl and from the extreme irreligiosity of modern Jaffa to the extreme religiosity of Mea Shearim, and all this through no decision of his own, but as a leaf in the wind. 33

The excerpts brought here from descriptions of occurrences in Yitzchak Kummer's life prove beyond doubt that Agnon intentionally created him as a passive character, for there is a unifying consistency in the description of him.

If, after all that, we are brought to the climax of his being bitten by a dog and dying thereof, clearly a connection must be made between the riddle of his death and his passivity.

What, then, is this connection, if at all?

The previous chapter saw a detailing of Agnon's attitudes on life

in Eretz Yisrael, which are in themselves sufficient to justify Yitzchak Kummer's punishment. But Agnon was not satisfied with his opinions stated in other works, and he insists on expressing them, personally, in 'Tmol Shilshom'. As he did in 'The Bridal Canopy', 'Hanidach' and 'Bilvav Yamim', here, too, he appears in the form of one of the characters of the novel, a character which although minor, is central in importance. This character is R. Menachemke Ha-Omed ('The standing one'). Menachemke's voice is Agnon's voice, and it is his opinions that we may see as being the author's.

There are many points of similarity between Agnon and R. Menachemke, and a list of similar qualities, ways of life, opinions and expressions, which prove beyond doubt the identity of the two men, now follows.<sup>34</sup>

- | <u>R. Menachemke</u>   | <u>Agnon</u>  |
|--|---|
| 1. "Menachemke was named Menachemke Ha-Omed' because he did everything standing ... and when he learnt he did it standing, by a rostrum which he had fixed for himself". <sup>35</sup> | 1. It was well known that Agnon wrote and learnt standing by a rostrum in his study.  |
| 2. "He had no books, other than one gemmarah out of which he learnt." <sup>36</sup>  | 2. "... I started at the beginning of the tractate, so as to learn the tractate in its proper order, in order to be the complete master of one tractate". <sup>37</sup> |

3. "He hated the Rabbinate, and even that which had a shadow of Rabbinate connected with it was abhorrent to him". 38
4. Menachemke was very thrifty: "His stinginess went so far that once he moved from dwelling to dwelling, and he took with him the straw from his bed." 40  
and  
"Man's needs are a matter of convention, that a man decides how much he needs for his livelihood, and because in my case, my needs are according to my income, I can say I have a livelihood." 42
5. " ... A land of which it was written 'the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it' cannot be as they expect it, for the eye of his Providence is different from the eyes of those who advise and plan". 44
3. Agnon's dislike and distaste for the Rabbinate was dealt with in "Shai Agnon's Eretz Yisrael". 39
4. "All our lives we lived in modesty and humility Estherlein and the children became used to this life." 41  
and  
"We lived in great poverty but we did not feel it, because our needs were few and small. In those days, one who lived in two rooms was considered very wealthy". 43
5. "You seeked in the land not what our forefathers seeked in it nor what the books tell of it nor the land as it is, but a land as you demand it, and for this reason the land could not carry you. A land which the Lord your God seeks all the days, not as you seek it nor as your fellows seek it, but as the Lord your God seeks it". 45  
In addition to the similarity of the words of Menachemke, and the words of 'A Guest for the night', the verse which the former quotes is a continuation of the latter's verse". 46

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|--|--|
| <p>6. "Menachemke waited for his guest ... and he stood and learnt until the morning broke. And when morning came ... he did not lie down to sleep ... learnt all day until he completed the tractate".<sup>47</sup></p> <p>7. "Through all that, his pity turned to the people in the fields, who do not know how good the Gemmarah is to those who learn it".<sup>50</sup></p> <p>8. "They mean an average person, and I am less than average".<sup>52</sup></p> <p>9. "He greeted him and said 'what is R. Menachemke doing here?' 'Menachemke smiled and answered: 'when a Jew is in Jerusalem, do not ask him what he is doing, for being in Jerusalem is a deed in itself".<sup>54</sup></p> | <p>6. "He wrote 'Agunot' in one stretch, from four in the afternoon until four the following day ... twenty four whole hours passed without him once leaving his room".<sup>48</sup></p> <p>"I wrote the rough draft for 'Shvu-at Emunin' in twenty four hours".<sup>49</sup></p> <p>7. "Only the learning of a page of Gemmarah is not a waste of time ... Judaism is the Judaism of Torah, to which Gemmarah may be added, and that is all".<sup>51</sup></p> <p>8. "And as for myself, I am very small in my own eyes".<sup>53</sup></p> <p>9. "Due to a historical catastrophe, the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus King of Rome, I was born in one of the cities of the diaspora, but I have always considered myself as one who was born in Jerusalem".<sup>55</sup></p> |
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This in itself would be enough to prove the identity of R. Menachemke with Agnon. But there is one more point of major significance in construction the "evidence". Agnon was born of the Ninth of Av.<sup>56</sup> The Messiah, who was also born on the Ninth of Av, is 'Menachem' (comforter).<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Agnon "assumed that they would name me Menachem, for whoever is born on the Ninth of Av is given the name Manachem".<sup>58</sup> It is clear, therefore, that Agnon's connection to the name Menachem did not begin with 'Tmol Shilshom', but had been there throughout, and upon writing the novel, he used that which



was already there. The use of the name Menachem is particularly appropriate in 'Tmol Shilshom', for the novel deals with the dawn of the Messianic era.

Having proved the identity of the two men, let us now examine the role which Menachem plays in the novel, and his outlook in connection with our topic.

Although few of the many pages of the novel dwell upon Menachemke, these pages are compressed and most informative. A deep and thorough reading of these pages will throw a light on Agnon's feelings towards Yitzchak Kummer and his history.

Menachemke is a typical object of the triangle of qualities dealt with in the previous chapter:

1. "Each Jew must try with all his might to live in Eretz Yisrael"<sup>59</sup> These and other similar phrases and above all the fact that he himself went to live there, are evidence of the importance, for him, of Eretz Yisrael and dwelling in it.
2. He is imbued with the second quality of the triangle, namely fulfilling the commandments between man and man. His going up to Jerusalem is "for business". This "business" he explains as:

"One landowner in my town died and left young heirs and he left them a plot of land in Motzah and the Beit Din in our town appointed me custodian of the orphans' assets, so I went to see the assets. But I do not know whether I am entitled to accept the custodianship, because according to the law, a custodian

must be a man with sense in worldly matters, so as to keep the assets and profit from them, and I know that I have no sense in worldly matters. And so I am investigating the law. Perhaps I should take the land as a tenant and share the profits with the orphans". <sup>60</sup>

We see him caring for the orphans and for their inheritance, and he does it according to the law. We have witnessed his hospitality, <sup>61</sup> and visiting the sick. <sup>62</sup>

3. Adequate proof has accumulated as to the application of the third quality, commandments between man and God, to Menachemke. Yet it is worth seeing how Menachem applies this aspect of his being to the renewed, daily life in Eretz Yisrael.

"Menachem went up from Motzah to Jerusalem for two purposes. To buy himself a new pitchfork, and to exchange one tractate for another". <sup>63</sup>

These two go hand in hand. The pitchfork is agriculture, earthliness, practicality - between man and man and between man and land - and not only does it not contradict the other aspect, of a new tractate - between man and God - but it actually supplements it. A new tractate and a new pitchfork complete each other, and because he had thought of both aspects:

"He succeeded in both more than he had expected. The old pitchfork could be fixed and so he did not have to spend his money on a new one, and because of that he could buy a new tractate and yet keep the old one". <sup>64</sup>

In these lines, we read a declaration of faith by Agnon alias Menachemke. The old way of life - the old pitchfork - may be

suited to the modern, changing world. There is no need to replace it and therefore no need to spend money on a new pitchfork. There is no need to hunt in strange lands, and then it will be possible to keep both tractates, the old and the new. The old way of life is adapted to the conditions of life in Eretz Yisrael, and not only is the old tractate not sold, but strength is added by the addition of a new tractate, the tractate of those mitzvot and that way of life which can be had in no place other than Eretz Yisrael.

This, then, is Menachemke's (and Agnon's) opinion. And because Menachem possesses all those qualities which he sees as necessary, and his way of life is the correct one, it is his right, perhaps even his duty, to point out to Yitzchak Kummer his failures and shortcomings and their reasons.

The timing of Menachemke's appearances in the story must also be seen in this light. He appears three times in 'Tmol Shilshom' and each appearance comes at a stage which summarizes a chapter of Yitzchak's life. Menachemke, then, serves as Yitzchak's conscience.<sup>65</sup>

Kummer first meets Menachemke after severing his relations with Sonya. After spiritual stock-taking and viewing his situation pessimistically, he thinks of the wonderful new world of Ein-Ganim, being built before his own eyes, in which he has no share. "I came to Eretz Yisrael to build it and guard it, and what am I in the end? A housepainter, a dirtier".<sup>66</sup>

This is an important point in Yitzchak's deterioration. The process is familiar:

"Because he felt that his craft was superfluous, he became superfluous in his own eyes, and when he realized that he was superfluous in his own eyes, he became superfluous in other's eyes".<sup>67</sup>

This defeatist approach is so opposed to Menachem's way, who tries to return him to the correct path, saying:

"... The land is destroyed and desolate, and because it is difficult to live in a place of destruction, it must be restored and made habitable, and if so it is essential to restore it from its state of destruction .... the land is waiting for us, her sons, that we should build it".<sup>68</sup>

In other words, no time may be wasted on sorrowful thoughts. The land needs actions, not thoughts about actions. If, Menachem is saying, you failed because you did not succeed in cultivating the earth as you had intended to do, you still have your craft with which you can assist in the restoration of the land. Be satisfied with your lot, and build the land with that which you do!

But all this is of no avail. Yitzchak does not return to Menachem because he went "to listen to Falk Shpaltleder's lecture".<sup>69</sup> This Shpaltleder is the opposite of Menachem, and that for which he stands. He opposes attachment to the land and to the Hebrew language, and makes futile speeches, words being his only strength:

"From the moment he got onto the stage, he did not taste a thing, but only sweated like a bear, and his guts roared like a drum".<sup>70</sup>

In the course of his speech, he jokes about the coming of Messiah:

"Because the Jews became accustomed to waiting for the Messiah, they got used to waiting and lingering with everything".<sup>71</sup>

Words, words, words - and no actions. Yitzchak chose Shplaltleder's verbosity, and turned his back to R. Menachemke's practicality.

That is, after the severing of his superficial relations with Sonya, Yitzchak is given a chance to change his ways, and for this reason he is confronted with Menachem. Yet hard as Menachem tries, Yitzchak does not change:

"Yitzchak did not return to Menachem ... Menachem waited for his guest. The kettle was standing, whistling, and Menachem learnt until day broke ....."<sup>72</sup>

The gates of repentance never close, but Yitzchak does not enter them.

The second meeting of the two men takes place in Jerusalem, before Yitzchak's marriage to Shifra. Shifra is trying on her bridal gown, and instead of going to her home, Yitzchak goes to the house of study, and there he meets Menachemke.<sup>73</sup> Here, again, Yitzchak reiterates a sore point and expresses his regret at not becoming an agricultural worker. In approaching Menachem, he wants approval of his actions until then and endorsement of his future life.

Apologizing for not succeeding with the soil, he expresses hopes that Me-a She-a'im will be his salvation, and that his marriage to Shifra will succeed, assisting him in his improvement. But Menachemke, serving as a conscience, is not so optimistic as

Yitzchak, and is honest and sincere, saying, "In any case you would have been regretful". That is: Your livelihood and occupation do not matter. Whether in agriculture or elsewhere, you would regret your actions. Yitzchak understands well what Menachem says of him comprehending the verdict, and asks in anxiety:

" 'Why do you say that?' Menachem answered  
 'Whoever sorrows over something which he  
 has not done, might live to regret everything' ".

Menachem is saying that marriage to Shifra will not save Yitzchak, nor will anything else, because he sorrows over everything. He never does anything whole heartedly, with his entire being, and afterwards, after opportunities irreversibly slip through his fingers, he regrets all which he had not done. However, Menachem is saying, this is not how things should be done. This is not the way to restore and rebuild a destroyed land. The builders of the land must be aware of its problems. They must be whole-heartedly dedicated to the act of building, and not search for abstract ideas concerning it. Dedication to the ultimate aim and an active life will rebuild the land, while bemoaning lost opportunities neither assists nor contributes to the act of building - it simply has no effect. You, Yitzchak, have no hope and no remedy. As such, you are guilty, and must therefore wait for the execution of your sentence.

Their third meeting, which is in fact not a meeting, because Yitzchak is not aware of it, takes place after the execution of the sentence. Yitzchak is lying on his deathbed, and Menachem is in Jerusalem, busying himself with rebuilding the land and caring for the orphans' property.

"Menachem went to visit the sick man. When he stood by his bed he took out his new Gemmarah to look at it, and having looked at it, he did not put it down. Rivkah and Shifra who were tired lay down to rest from their labours, and Menachem's voice sweetened their sleep ..." <sup>74</sup>

Yitzchak is dying, having been bitten by a dog. It is appropriate that a dog should bring about his death. When he arrived in Israel, Yitzchak met the dog, - Yetzer Hara - <sup>75</sup> and did not struggle with it. His grave sin is nonchalance towards the "dog" of inaction. His punishment is measure for measure, for his sin and his retributions are of his Yetzer Hara, the dog.

In the light of what was said in the previous chapter, and in view of Agnon's demands, more precisely, of the Land's demands of those living in Eretz Yisrael, it is obvious that Yitzchak had to die, for he did not live up to those demands. Agnon allowed him to try his luck in all possible ways and places. He went back and forth between Jaffa and Jerusalem, and visited in Ein-Ganim and Petach-Tikvah. He lived with the labourers of Jaffa and the Chassidim of Me-ah She-arim. He was given many and varied opportunities to initiate and activate himself. Yet he remained the same, being carried along, unable and unwilling to decide upon anything concerning himself. Having undergone everything that it is possible to undergo in Eretz Yisrael, he reached a cul-de-sac in Me-ah She-arim. It is the end of his path and the end of him. There is no further escape, no further ground for experimentation. Yitzchak has completed every test possible, and failed each one. His inactive worthlessness brought about his death, and only he is

responsible for it. Passive characters like Yitzchak cause a curse to be laid out over the land, and when he died, the stumbling block was removed:

"There was great rejoicing in the world. Such a rejoicing had never been seen .... And you, our brothers, men of merit, in Kineret and Merchavya, in Ein Ganim and in Um Juni, now called Deganya, went out to your work in fields and gardens such work which our friend Yitzchak was not privileged enough to do".<sup>76</sup>

The end of the tale is connected to its beginning. Yitzchak died because he did not have the courage and resolution to stick by that for which he had come to Eretz Yisrael - agriculture. For what, then, was he privileged enough?

"Yitzchak our friend was not privileged enough to stand on the soil and plough and sow, but ... like his grandfather R. Yudel, ... he was given a grave in the holy land".<sup>77</sup>

We have already seen that Agnon did not think highly of the custom of coming to die in Eretz Yisrael and be buried in its soil,<sup>78</sup> and if that is all Yitzchak's merit, he was not very worthy.

In the light of the above it is reasonable to assume that Yitzchak's death is not an end in itself, but rather a means to express the author's stand on questions concerning settling and rebuilding Eretz Yisrael. In "killing" Yitzchak Kummer, Agnon expresses his utmost reservation towards him and towards all that which he represents.



M. Tochner feels that in "Tmol Shilshom" Agnon did not reveal his evaluation about those Jews who engage in agricultural work, but postponed the expression of his views to a hitherto unpublished work, "Chdkat Sadeh" <sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, Tochner, in searching for the author's point of view, reaches the conclusion that in this novel, there is no point of view which is specifically the author's. He feels that Agnon does not have a "hero". <sup>80</sup>

In fact, Agnon did reveal the hero, more precisely the heroes, of "Tmol Shilshom". On the private plane, the ideal is R. Menachemke Ha-Omed, while on the public, communal plane it is Ein-Ganim.

On the private plane, we are presented with a broad spectrum of characters of many and varied characteristics: R. Feish and R. Grunem Yekum Purkan, the staunch individualists, Blaukopf, Sweet Leg, Arzaf, the milliners of Jerusalem, the secularized students at the Yeshiva, Sonya and her suitors, and many others of varied approaches to the problems presented in the novel. Completing the spectrum is Yitzchak Kummer, with his inactivity, and central of all the figures is R. Menachemke, a positive force.

The same is true of the communal plane. The secular Jaffa at the one extreme, the zealous Me-ah She-arim at the other extreme. <sup>81</sup> Here too, we are presented with a golden mean, Ein Ganim.

It is possible that in this novel Agnon wished to present the problem of a possible dicotomy of the Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael, with a complete separation of religious and secular. The solution to this problem is Ein Ganim and R. Menachemke, in whom Agnon sees the correct approach to Eretz Yisrael, its problems and the manner of their solution, and its future.

In other words, Agnon disassociates himself not from Yitzchak's generation, but merely from Yitzchak himself. Yitzchak's generation is deliberately contrasted with R. Yudil's generation, and comes out of this comparison superior.<sup>82</sup> But it is his generation, and not Yitzchak, which is superior.

To express his opinion of Yitzchak's generation, and of their rebuilding the land, the epitome of which is Ein Ganim, Agnon compares them to the hidden Tzadik - one of the thirty six hidden Tzadikkim - whom R. Yudil meets on his journey.<sup>83</sup> There is no doubt of Agnon's appreciation of this Tzadik, and yet he appreciates the rebuilders of the land even more than he appreciates him. This opinion is expressed clearly, willingly and unhasitatingly, in a most central part of the novel - preceding R. Menachemke's meeting with Yitzchak Kummer:

"After Yitzchak left the people of Ein Ganim he walked a little at the periphery of the settlement, pondering what he saw and heard. Now where did he see and where did he hear, considering that from the day when the foundation stone for this workers' settlement had been laid he had not been there? He remembered one of the tales

which is told of his grandfather, R. Yudil Chassid, that once when he was travelling for the marriage of a poor bride he chanced by one village and spent the Sabbath with one of the thirty six Tzadikim, by virtue of whom the world stands. Yitzchak began pondering all which was said of that Hidden One. The Hidden One used to dig clay for the daughters of Israel to plaster the floors of their homes in honour of the Sabbath, and on the Sabbath he spoke only the holy tongue, and did not call his dwelling "home", for man's dwelling in this false world is not home. And when Yitzchak thought of those things he smiled to himself and said, "I Yitzchak, grandson of R. Yudil, spent time not with one Hidden One but with an entire group of Hidden Ones by virtue of whom the world stands, for even on weekdays they speak the holy tongue, and dig holes for manure, to better the soil of Eretz Yisrael, and as for the matter of "home", houses built by their own dwellers are certainly worthy of being called 'home' ". <sup>84</sup>

# REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "YITZCHAK KUMMER'S SIN"

1. Not for nothing was he named Yitzchak. Isaac, the second of the three Patriarchs, was the most passive one among them, and serves as a connecting link between his active father, Abraham, and son, Jacob: note the number of chapters dedicated to each in Genesis. His history is composed of things happening to him: he is "taken up" to the bind, a wife is "taken for him", and when in need of water, he attempts to redig his father's wells.

See also: P. Lander, ~~German~~ (Moznayim, Adar, 5706 p. 372). Lander explains Kummer's family name, which means 'sadness'. Sadness cannot dwell with activity.

2. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 9

3. *ibid.* p. 10

4. *ibid.* p. 65

5. *ibid.* p. 82. It is interesting to note Kurtzweil's words: "How typical it is that he never stopped obeying certain of the positive commandments". (Masot p. 224)

Agnon states "... in other things, too, he did as the majority of our fellows did. He did not go to synagogue and did not lay phylacteries and did not observe the Sabbath and did not respect the Holy Days. At first he separated the positive commandments from the negative commandments, and was careful not to transgress the 'Don'ts' while neglecting the 'Do's' ". (Tmol Shilshom p. 82) If he did sometimes recite the 'Shema', it was for a potion for sleep. (*ibid.* p.84) This cannot be termed "obeying the commandments".

6. *ibid.* p. 97

7. *ibid.* p. 100 Note that Kurtzweil does not take a stand on this issue. He writes: "It would be appropriate

to ask here ... who was more attracted to whom after Rabinowitz's departure - Sonya to Yitzchak or Yitzchak to Sonya? Who was the motivator? Who is responsible? Both or only one of them?" (Masot p. 105 - 106). From all that was said in the chapter, Sonya is clearly the moving force. Kurtzweil, however, lays the responsibility equally on both of them, and so explains Yitzchak's guilty feelings". "There is no reason to doubt the burden and weight of the guilt feelings for 'betraying' Rabinowitz, which trouble Yitzchak all his life" (ibid) Not so, There is no reason for Yitzchak's guilt feelings. Sonya was "available" and she approached him. His conscience is in keeping with his vacillating, insecure character. In this connection see also:

Y. Katz, Agnon Mul Hamevucha Hadatit in LeAgnon Shai p. 167 - 168.

A. Band, Nostalgia and Nightmare p. 428.

9. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 160
10. ibid. p. 183
11. ibid.
12. ibid.
13. ibid. p. 188
14. ibid. p. 190
15. ibid.
16. ibid. p. 223
17. ibid.
18. ibid. p. 497
19. ibid. p. 223
20. ibid. p. 240

21. *ibid.* p. 267, 268.

Tochner says. "How attracted he is to the suburbs of Jerusalem, populated by naive, innocent people ..., how much consistency and stubbornness he displays when meeting Shifra, how many disgraces he must tolerate before he can obtain her, and he withstands them all". (Pesher Agnon p.75 see also p. 66) Indeed, there is an erotic attraction to Shifra, but no attraction and striving towards the existence of Me-ah She-arim. The same is true of Y. Katz's remark on "Yitzchak's decision to find a remedy for himself in the Yishuv Yashan of Me-ah She-arim". Agnon mul Hamevucha Hadatit, in LeAgnon Shai p. 165). There is neither resolution nor is there perseverance in Yitzchak. See also P. Lander: 'Tmol Shilshom', in Moznayim, Adar 5706 p. 375

22. *ibid.* p. 331

23. *ibid.* p. 341

24. Concerning Yitzchak's confrontation with Sonya upon his return to Jaffa, see B. Kurtzweil, 'Masot' p. 111

25. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 374

26. *ibid.* p. 396

27. *ibid.* p. 418

28. *ibid.* p. 496

29. *ibid.* p. 504

30. *ibid.* p. 510

31. *ibid.* p. 543, 544

32. *ibid.* p. 275. In this connection see B. Kurtzweil Masot p. 105

33. For discussions of Yitzach's character see:

A. Band, Nostalgia and Nightmare p. 414 -447

Y. Rabinowitz, Darkei Agnon Be-itzur Giboro Hasifruti, in LeAgnon Shai p. 224.

Shorashim Umegamot p. 267

A. Schweid, Kelev Chutzot Ve-adam in Molad,  
Av 5718 p. 385

34. Observations concerning Agnon's character are quoted from his sayings during conversations and interviews and so on, or from those of his 'first-person' writings which are known to be autobiographical.
35. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 174
36. ibid. p. 175
37. 'A Guest for the Night' p. 413
38. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 175
39. D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 43, 70, 81.
40. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 175
41. D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 88
42. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 539
43. G. Yardeni, Sofrim Be-al Peh - Shai Agnon in Moznayim  
Av - Elul 5719 p. 250
44. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 176
45. 'A Guest for the Night' p. 90
46. Deutoronomy 11, 12
47. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 180. See also p. 542
48. D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 33
49. ibid. p. 80
50. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 180

51. D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 96 See also p. 104, 105, 111 and Korot Bateinu, in Ha-esh Vena-etzim p. 41.
52. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 542
53. From Shai Agnon's speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize. See also D. Kna'ani, Shai Agnon Be-al Peh, p. 98.
54. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 539
55. From Agnon's speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize.
56. Day of the destruction of both Temples. His birth date is known from his biography, and from "... I, who was born on the Ninth of Av ..." 'A Guest for the Night' p. 413
57. "On that day (the day of the destruction of the temple) Menachem was born" Bamidbar Rabba 13,1 "What is his (Messiah's) name? Some say his name is Menachem son of Chizkiya". Sanhedrin 98,2.
58. Shai Agnon, Yemei Yalduti, in Molad, Kisler 5724, p. 621
59. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 177
60. ibid. p. 539
61. ibid. p. 177, 540
62. ibid. p. 602
63. ibid. p. 601
64. ibid. The meaning given here to R Menachemke's pitchfork is similar to the meaning of the Coin and the Loaf in the conversation between Elijah the Prophet and R. Yisrael Ba-al Shem Tov in the story 'Giluy Eliyahu' (the Revelation of Elijah), Ha-esh Vena-etzim, p. 93-98
65. Tochner, however, sees Yitzchak's floundering as being expressed by the dog, Balak. Pesher Agnon p. 62-80. See also B. Kurtzweil, Masot p. 104-115.



66. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 176
67. Sippur Pashut, in Al Kapot Haman-ul. p. 176. See also p. 409, and 'A Guest for the Night', p. 130, 394.
68. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 177
69. ibid. p. 180
70. ibid.
71. ibid.
72. ibid.
73. ibid. p. 538-542
74. ibid. p. 601
75. "The first (or perhaps second) thing which Agnon published in his youth was a Yiddish poem on R. Yosef Della Reina, apparently in 1903. One of the central motifs in the poem is the appearance of Satan and his wife, Sama-el and Lilith, in the form of a dog and a bitch". D. Sadan, Al Shai Agnon, p. 125, 126. See also Preface p. XI
76. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 606 - 607
77. ibid.
78. above p. 194
79. M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 55
80. ibid. p. 74. See also p. 197
81. Although Agnon does not favour the zealous Me-ah She-arim, he does not negate it, and sees some positive persons in it, such as the great rabbi who came "from the Land of Hungary, a Godly and saintly man, Ga-on and Tzaddik, and the goodness of his heart and his righteousness were great as his wisdom" ('Tmol Shilshom' p. 556). See also M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 68.

82. It is worth noting that R. Yudil is mentioned often, and in various contexts, in 'Tmol Shilshom'. See pp. 10, 14, 30, 31, 64, 228, 249, 355, 360, 361, 458 and 607.
83. 'The Bridal Canopy'. p. 209-212
84. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 173.

## CONCLUSION

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"Any attempt to summarize Agnon's total creative enterprise will be considered the opening of a chapter rather than the closing of one".<sup>1</sup>

It can be compared to one who is lost in a maze. After much wandering, he sees a door on which is a plaque saying "exit". Upon opening that door, he discovers a long passage with innumerable doors on each side. Opening the door did not only not ease his exit from the labyrinth, but on the contrary, it confused him further. In the same way, any attempt at deciphering the secrets of Agnon's writings only increases the mystery. The more successful such an attempt is, the more doors marked "exit" he opens, the more new doors will confront him, and so will increase the number of riddles in the various levels of the work, which will serve as an added challenge and hence a goal towards increased effort at finding the keys that will open those locked doors.

This thesis has tried to draw that Agnon is deeply rooted in the ancient Jewish culture, while being firmly entrenched in the soil of the homeland, in the renewed and rejuvenated earth of Eretz Yisrael.

Why?

Because Agnon tries to find a new way of relating to the issue of "Great is the ewe which stands among seventy wolves".<sup>2</sup> Agnon tries to solve the riddle of Jewish survival over millenia, in the face of unfavourable circumstances, and tries to discover the secret of its present reawakening.

As shown in the preface of this work, the subject of "struggle" has occupied Agnon since his youth. It is only by strength of continuous and consistent struggle by the Jewish community and Jewish individuals that the Jewish people, in the course of its dispersion and of its national renaissance, has succeeded in staying alive.

It must be added that although Agnon's writing is on Jewish subjects, the meaning underlying it is universal. Naturally, he sketched characters in the light of a background which he knew, liked and admired. He created his characters out of the same raw material out of which he himself was modelled. Did his Herschel not attend the same Zionist club which Agnon himself attended? Did R. Yudil not journey in the villages of Agnon's birth province? Did Yitzchak Kummer not sit in the self same café in Jaffa in which the authour sat? Did he not meet the same types in that café? The list is long and well known.

And because particular words are said by a villager from Yaslowitz, and others are said by one from Ein-Ganim, does that make them any less universal in value than if they are said by one from a London or Paris salon? Would that have turned Agnon into a "European Writer"?<sup>3</sup> And would that be an honour, or would that limit him?

Yet Agnon's Jewish uniqueness might mislead in that it might hinder seeing his broad ranging meaning in its proper perspective. Yet his Jewishness and his universality do not negate each other nor do they limit each other but they complete each other. His greatness lies in that while raising distinctly Jewish problems

and dealing with them, he also deals with universal questions, pertaining to all of humanity.

Agnon himself affirmed this approach to the understanding and deciphering of his writings. In criticizing the Haskalah literature, he said:

"It is the sin of Emancipation literature that it puts a barrier between a Jew and his humanity. In my writings you will find a different attitude".<sup>4</sup>

Is Herschel's problem unique to a member of the Jewish faith? Surely a domineering mother anywhere, any time, would do to her son as the Jewish Tzirel did to her only son, the Jewish Herschel. And surely a member of any faith would react as Herschel did, and his reaction was no different due to his Jewishness. The same is true of Menashe Chaim and Kreindil Tshorney, of Dinah, Ben Uri and the others in the gallery of Agnon's portraits. It would most probably be true to say that any writer, of any denomination, of Agnon's calibre, might have created the same living images with the same problems and possibly with the same solutions.

As has already been said, Agnon deals with general universal problems placed against a Jewish background, and in the description Agnon's method of expressing an opinion on major issues is most original.

In his books, Agnon describes a process which began with "The Bridal Canopy" and "Bilvav Yamim" and extended as far as "Tmol Shilshom". In "The Bridal Canopy" we read of Messianic yearnings, manifested in R. Yudel and his fellows.<sup>5</sup> "Bilvav Yamim" sees the first

humble step towards realization of these yearnings.<sup>6</sup> Upon readings "A Guest for the Night", the reader shares pangs of Messiah, preceeding the coming of the Messiah, while in "Tmol Shilshom" are seen the first rays of Messianic light.

In "Bilvav Yamim" Agnon describes his own aliyah, yet he participates also in "Tmol Shilshom" in the form of R. Menachemke Ha-Omed. This is because "Tmol Shilshom", in a way, transcends "Bilvav Yamim". The nilbavim in "Bilvav Yamim" went to Eretz Yisrael to worship God, while R. Menachemke went there to worship God and to work the land of His nation. If critics tend to say that Yitzchak Kummer is an extension of R. Yudil, then we may say that Agnon's extension is Agnon: the Jerusalemite wise man in "The Bridal Canopy" is the Agnon who dines at R. Avigdor's table in "Hanidach" is the Agnon of "A Guest for the Night" is the Agnon of "Tmol Shilshom". In each of these stories the author appears in a different guise, in a different role, showing a different one of his many manifestations. Yet the foundation remains the same.

Tochner wrote:

"... The world of Agnon's creation revolves around Agnon himself. He is its hero and its confession ..."<sup>7</sup>

Yet despite that he added:

"Yet with all that you cannot break into the enchanted circle which is the artist's isolated reality. The problem in Agnon's writing is the question of the being of the artist who hides and is revealed alternately".

That is: where is the creator and what is his point of view? This question bothered Tochner ceaselessly.<sup>8</sup> Kurtzweil, too, dealt with it, and he discovered the identity of Dr. Yekuti-el Ne-eman in

"Pat Shlema".<sup>9</sup>

To me it seems that from several passages in this paper, it is clear that the poet participates actively in many events, and expresses his opinion on a variety of happenings. In other words, Agnon presents his "subject" in a rich variety of ways, but the subject is a unified oneness.

His subject, the subject of "struggle" appears in Agnon's writings on two levels:

1. The personal level.
2. The national level.

In order to trace the struggle, Agnon established for himself a point of observation in his writings, to observe his handiwork and the extent of their perserverance in their struggle.

Agnon does not refrain from criticizing where it is necessary. Yet it is important to emphasize that his criticism is directed against Jews, and not against Judaism and Jewry as a whole, which he loves. In his own words:

"Often ..... I use irony and even satire as an expression of a critical attitude ..... but this is meant to be criticism of Jews, not of Judaism".<sup>10</sup>

"There is humour ... which isn't paining and chastizing, but laughs from the depths of good-heartedness. True, it applies also to shortcomings, but it is not the laughter of a foe but the laughter of a friend. Agnon's joking is for himself, and it never hurts".



The criticism is there. But it is not destructive, as in the writings of the Haskalah writers, but is from affection and love.

The criticism serves as an expression of faith. Because the keys are in our hands and it all depends on us, we have the strength to withstand a reality which places personal responsibility upon each one:

"Eve brought one death and we bring upon ourselves death every day and every hour with vanity and evilness of spirit".<sup>12</sup>

Despite the harsh, uncompromising exterior and seeming pessimism of the confession of the narrator in "A Guest for the Night", and of the secrets of his soul and the murmurs of his heart, in fact Agnon sounds a loud trumpet, that in the place of pessimistic negation comes optimistic affirmation.

It seems to me that even the criticism Agnon has of certain phenomena in past generations must be viewed and understood in a positive light. In posing human weaknesses of generations gone by, Agnon is in fact encouraging his contemporaries and their descendants:

"Your ancestors were not saintly, and you therefore have the right and duty to see yourselves as perfectable".

This is the essence of the idea he expresses, and it is what this thesis, from beginning to end, from the nilbavim's aliyah in "Bilvav Yamim" to Yitzchak Kummer's death in "Tmol Shilshom", attempted to expose.

The problem discovered with the revelation of the identity of the eighth traveller in "Bilvav Yamim", "he whose name we have forgotten" is an indicator for the understanding of Agnon's work. Agnon uses a fixed set of scales for weighing each and every one of his characters.

The presence of "he whose name we have forgotten" is felt throughout our investigations. The exposition of the true character of R. Yisrael Shlomo the warden supported our theory as to the time dimension. Time is not a neutralizing factor, in the same way as place is not influential. Yitzchak Kummer failed in the same way that R. Yisrael Shlomo and many others failed, because of "he whose name we have forgotten", and because of lack of willingness to have a confrontation with him.

The discovery of Agnon's participation in many of his stories, particularly his identification with Menachemke, opens up new horizons for the understanding of Agnon and for his relating to topical problems.

From the reading of Agnon's writings it becomes clear that for him, the most topical issue was the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, and the problems arising from it. His approach is very practical. We heard, through Menachemke, of the adaption of the old pitchfork and of adding a new tractate to the old one. An idea was implied in the finding of the old key from Buczacz in Jerusalem, as in the tale of Dr. Levy's books and in the fact that the narrator found a home in Eretz Yisrael by virtue of them. The description of the three phases in the life of a nation as well as "Tachat Haetz" contributed to an understanding of Agnon's conception of the Jewish right to Eretz Yisrael and the ways to attain it. These and others

are ample proof of the author's practical approach and of the fact that he pays much attention to the solution of practical problems - religious, social and concerning the security - of Eretz Yisrael.

Agnon deals directly with the problems of a Jew who wishes to live his Judaism in Eretz Yisrael, within the framework of twentieth century modernity.

In so doing, he expects his characters to fulfill the demands he places on them. The three old men in "Brit Ahava" answered the three requirements of the "triangle", and reached Eretz Yisrael, yet Agnon is not satisfied with them. This is because they did not function according to the method of Menachemke - Agnon, and did not adapt themselves to the reality of life in Eretz Yisrael, their aliyah not having been practical.

To conclude, let us return to points mentioned in the Preface, which we attempted to prove in this paper:

1. There is a unity in Agnon's writing.
2. He has a didactic intention in his writing.

As a result of combining these two points, a third may be added:

3. Agnon's central theme is struggle.

Concerning supreme importance of struggle in Agnon, let us return for a short while to Menashe Chaim of "Vehaya He-Akov Lemishor". His struggle and his rebellion at the end of his days are a rejection of all convention and a revolt against his Maker. In this sense, he is an exception which points to the rule. Whereas for Agnon the positive struggle is one which aims at attaining perfection in all

three sides of the "triangle", in the case of Menashe Chaim, the struggle surpasses these conventions and tries to penetrate Divine Truth, and in so doing he completely forgoes the entire "triangle". In Menashe Chaim the struggle appears in a pure form, having been rid not only of its physical, material elements but also of the spiritual.

If so, Dov Sadan stated that:

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS CONFUSION" 13

And if Tochner stated that:

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE BELIEVER" 14

This paper suggests that:

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE STRUGGLE".

# REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "CONCLUSION"

1. M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 197
2. Esther Rabba 10,10 Tanchuma Toldot 5.
3. D. Sadan, in his introduction to M. Tochner's Pesher Agnon deals with this subject and writes: "The critics .... see Agnon as standing at the centrepont of modernity, whether in its unique Jewish version or in its overall European version ... the others see the author as principally an illustrator of the Jewish totality". (p. 22)
4. Zvi E. Kurtzweil, I have lunch with Shai Agnon, in the Jewish Chronicle 25.2.1955 p. VII
5. In a letter to his publisher S.Z. Shoken, dated 7.6.1927, Agnon writes, concerning "The Bridal Canopy", that "the content of the story takes place in the years 5680 - 5681 (1820 -1821) in the town of Brod and its environs". See Gazit, vol. 27, no. 1-4, p. 17, note 44.
6. 'Bilvav Yamim' takes place in 1865. See first chapter of this paper.
7. Pesher Agnon p. 74
8. ibid. p. 50 ff.
9. Masot p. 7, 86-94.
10. Zvi E. Kurtzweil, I have lunch with S.Y. Agnon in the Jewish Chronicle, 25.2.1955 p. VIII. See also Rishmei Pegisha in the special addition to Ha-aretz, 9.12.1966, p. 7.
11. A.M. Lipshitz, Shai Agnon, Ketavim p. 217
12. 'A Guest for the Night' p. 271
13. D. Sadan, Al Shai Agnon, p. 45. See also his introduction to M. Tochner's Pesher Agnon, p. 16.
14. M. Tochner, Pesher Agnon p. 16.

## ADDENDA

## ON YETZER HARA <sup>1</sup> IN "AGNON'S WRITINGS"

One purpose of this thesis is to verify its title: "Man's struggle, - religious and social - as a central motif in the writings of S.Y. Agnon". From previous chapters it has emerged that "struggle" means man's conflict with himself, with his inclinations, and his desires, hidden or revealed, that is: with what is commonly termed Yetzer Hara. This concept has a very real existence in Agnon's work, and its presence is almost physical.

The various chapters of this thesis deal with this concept, but the treatment was sporadic, answering the needs of each chapter and related to its appearance in each story. However, the concept of Yetzer Hara was important to Agnon and central to his writings, and this chapter is a concentrated treatment of the subject.

In the light of the fact that the sources had so significant an influence on Agnon's work, we will first examine their attitude to the subject.

The general conception in the sources is that Yetzer Hara is an Emissary of the Almighty.

In the light of the monotheistic conceptions of the Bible and of Judaism, it could not be otherwise. Monotheism cannot posit the existence of an independent force functioning of its own free will, against the will of its Creator.

M.D. Kassuto, in his book MeAdam ad Noah<sup>2</sup>, dealt broadly with this matter. Using verses and fragments of verses from various

places in the Bible, Kassuto proves that among the children of Israel, as among other ancient nations were prevalent ideas connected with the creation of the world, which posited the existence of forces independent of the Creator and even opposing Him to the extent of revolt. Yet clearly the "revolt" of these "forces" is not really a "revolt", for it is inconceivable that this should exist in Jewish monotheism. The passages quoted below, whether from the Bible or from post Biblical literature contain no more than a hint of alien mythology, and are folk tales which infiltrated into Jewish culture, having been metamorphosed to suit its spirit.

These stories relate particularly to the "Prince of the Sea", who revolted against his Maker:

"Said Reish Lakish: when the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the sea, it was expanding and growing until the Holy One, Blessed be He, rebuked it and dried it".<sup>3</sup>

"R. Yehuda said in the name of Rav: When the Holy One, Blessed be He, was about to create the world, he told the Prince of the Sea: "Open your mouth and swallow all the waters in the world" (Rashi: so that dry land will emerge). He said: "Master of the Universe, what I have is enough". (that is, he refused). Promptly He kicked him and killed him, as it is written (Job, 26, 12): "He broke the (Prince of the) Sea with his strength, and in his understanding he smiteth through Rahab". Said R. Yitzchak "From this we learn that the Prince of the Sea is called Rahab".

This event is implied in various verses of the Bible:



"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord. Awake as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times. Art thou not it who hewed Rahab in pieces, that pierceth the dragon? Art thou not it that dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep ...?" <sup>5</sup>

"...Who have placed the sand for a bound of the sea, an everlasting ordinance which it cannot pass; And although the waves thereof toss themselves, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it". <sup>6</sup>

"Thou didst break the sea in pieces by Thy strength; Thou didst shatter the heads of the sea-monsters in the waters". <sup>7</sup>

"Thou didst crush Rahab as one that is slain; Thou didst scatter thine enemies with the arm of Thy strength". <sup>8</sup>

"Am I a sea, or a sea-monster, that Thou settest a watch over me?" <sup>9</sup>

"He hath described a boundary upon the face of the waters, unto the confines of light and darkness ...". <sup>10</sup>

One more passage from Isiah, to return us to the subject of this chapter:

"In that day the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan and the slant serpent and Leviathan the tortuous serpent and He will slay the dragon that is in the sea". <sup>11</sup>

In this prophecy, Isiah speaks of Messianic days, when God will clear out all evil. This clearing out will be done through killing of those forces which rebel against God: Leviathan, serpent, dragon, those forces of evil connected with the revolt on the sea referred to above. Among those mentioned by Isiah as due for punishment

is the serpent. It requires no great effort to identify the serpent with Yetzer Hara. From his temptation of Adam and Eve, the serpent has always been identified with Yetzer Hara, and Isiah's words are expressed in a phrase from our sages:

"R. Yehuda expostulated in the future the Holy One, Blessed be He, will take Yetzer Hara and slaughter him ...". 12

In later Midrash, too, we read of Manaël's attempted revolt:

"Samael was the greatest of all Princes of Heaven .... he took his gang and went down and saw all the creatures which the Holy One, Blessed be He, had created, and found none so cleaver in evil intent as the serpent, as was said (Genesis 3, 1) "And the serpent was the most subtle of all the beasts of the field". And he was as a camel, so he ascended and rode upon its back, and Torah screamed and said: Samael, now that the world has been created, is it time to revolt against the Lord? ... Master of the Universe, jeer at the "horse" and its rider ...." Each thing which the serpent did and each word which he said, it was on behalf of Samael". 13

These are distant echoes of seemingly independent forces of evil which slipped unnoticed into our sources, undoubtedly with the influence of foreign culture, and certainly without awareness of their foreignness at the time of writing.

However, this is not the truly basic approach of our sources towards the issue of Yetzer Hara. It is interesting to see Samael, boastful and seeming to act independently in the passage from Piskei De-Rabbi Eliezer serving the function of a pathetic messenger in another Midrashic passage.

At the conclusion of Devarim Rabba, Moses' death is described. The Holy One, Blessed be He, sent Samael to take Moses' soul:

"... and when he saw him sitting and writing the Tetragrammaton, and his radiating face resembled the sun and he looks like an Angel of the Lord of Hosts, Samael feared Moses .... and when he saw him, he was shaking and quivering as a woman in childbirth and could not open his mouth to speak with Moses".<sup>14</sup>

A long and tiring dialogue ensues, which ends with Samael's defeat, Moses sending him away, saying:

"Villain, go from here ... run from before me. I do not give my sould to you."

The pathetic, rebuked Samael has no choice but to return empty handed and shamefacedly to his sender. The Holy One, Blessed be He, sends him again on his mission, and this time his failure is as great as previously, but this time he is subjected to physical humiliation as well as all else:

"Moses immediately became infuriated with him and took up his staff, on which is inscribed the Tetragrammaton, and he smited him with all his strength until he ran from before him and followed him in God's name ... and blinded him ..."

Clearly, this is no independent force, but a servant fulfilling his master's will. In fact, the passage begins with "The evil angel, Samael", and clearly in his capacity as an angel he plays the roles assigned to him when the need arises.<sup>15</sup>

The general approach of our sources towards Yetzer Hara is that man's function is to struggle with it, while the function of Yetzer Hara is to serve as a challenge to man, forcing him to live in

continual conflict with it. Despite this, there are several phrases in our sources which refer to Yetzer Hara, not only as a psychological phenomenon, but as a physical being.

Typical of this approach is the Gemarrah's description of the killing of Yetzer Hara of idolatory. In the passage, the Gemarrah comes to explain the phenomenon whereby the problem of idolatory ceases to exist after the Return to Zion after the Babylonian exile (536 B. C. E.) This is done picturesquely. At the beginning of the period of the Second Temple, we hear the leaders of the nation complaining and saying:

"He (the Yetzer Hara of Idolatory) destroyed our Holy House and burnt our Temple and killed all the Tzadikim, and exiled the people of Israel from its land. And it is still among us. Was it given to us only to overcome it and be rewarded? We want neither it nor its reward. A note fell from Heaven and on it was inscribed "True". (Rashi: I agree: Divine Consent).... They fasted three days and three nights ... out of the Holy of Holies came the image of a lion cub of fire. The prophet said to them: "That is the Yetzer Hara of Idolatory" ... When they caught him, a hair slipped from his fur. He roared, and his voice carried over four hundred leagues. They said, "What shall we do? Lest he will evoke heavenly mecry upon him through his bitter supplication". The prophet said, cast him in a vessel of liquid lead and close his mouth with lead, for lead draws the voice .... They said "As it is now a time of goodwill, let us ask for aid in overcoming Yetzer Hara of promiscuity". They asked, and it was given them. The prophet said to them "If you kill him, the world will be destroyed". (Rashi: "The world will come to an end, for people will cease cohabiting and procreating"). They imprisoned it for three days. They tried to find a freshly laid egg, and they could not find one in all Eretz Yisrael.

(Rashi: "Because all reproductive systems stopped functioning") They said: "What shall we do? If we kill it, the world will come to an end. Should we pray to disable him partially?" (Rashi: "That he will cause man to desire his wife but none other") Heaven does not grant half measures. What did they do? They blinded it and left it. And it helped in that man does not desire his close relatives". <sup>16</sup>

"Yetzer Hara is like a fly and dwells between the two openings of the heart....

... it looks like wheat ...

... Man has two kidneys. One gives him good advice and the other gives him bad advice". <sup>17</sup>

However, the sources generally refer to Yetzer Hara in its psychological meaning. Yetzer Hara appears in certain images, but this is done only to simplify the concept and not to give Yetzer Hara any particular form. <sup>18</sup> The references to Yetzer Hara as an independent force, an enemy from the outside are few and far between. Usually, the opposite is true. Even in the passage where Yetzer Hara is compared to a fly, that fly sits at the openings of the heart.

Yetzer Hara exists in man's innermost being, and fulfills an important function. Because among the cornerstones of the Jewish religion are a belief in free choice and in "reward and retribution", there is an essential need for Yetzer Hara, without it, the concept of choice has no place, and without the possibility of overcoming it or succumbing to it, there is no meaning to "reward and retribution". Yetzer Hara serves as a constant challenge throughout a man's life. Overcoming it makes for elevation and for appropriate reward, and succumbing leads to degradation and then punishment.

In our sources, the conflict of man with his Yetzer Hara takes on many forms. At times, he stands alone and almost helpless in the

face of his Yetzer Hara. Sometimes he overcomes alone, but often he appeals to God for aid, as in R. Yehuda Hanassi's prayer, now included in the daily service:

"May the will come before you, God, our God and God of our fathers, to save us .... from Yetzer Hara ... and from corrupting Satan". 19

"So Israel said to the Holy One, Blessed be He: "Master of the Universe, you created in us Yetzer Hara from our youth, as is said, (Genesis 8, 21): "The inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth", and it causes to sin before you .... We beseech Thee, remove it from us, so that we may do your will". 20

"Though we sin and anger You, do not remove Yourself from us". 21

Generally the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot and good deeds serve as a barrier against temptation:

"I have created Yetzer Hara and I created Torah as a foil for it". 22

"Rabbi Yishmael said: "If this villain (Yetzer Hara) accosts you, pull him to a House of Study. If it be made of stone it will disintegrate, and if from iron, it will crack". 23

"Let a man always incite his Yetzer Ha'ov (good inclination) over his Yetzer Hara. It is well if he defeats it, and if not, let him study Torah .... It is well if he defeats it, and if not, let him recite the Shema ... It is well if he defeats it, and if not let him remember the day of his death". 24

Likewise, from the interpretation of the Midrash it is clear that Torah can protect from Yetzer Hara:

" "And he saw a well in the field" - that is the synagogue. "And there were three herds of cattle" - those are the three men called to the Torah. "And from that well they watered" - that from there they heard the Torah. "The large stone" - that is Yetzer Hara. "All the herds gathered there" - that is the community. "And they rolled the stone" - that from there they heard Torah. "And they returned the stone ...." - that when they left, Yetzer Hara returned to its place".<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, then, the pursuit of Torah is essential in the removal of Yetzer Hara.<sup>26</sup>

This pursuit is not the sole aid. One must use various ruses to overcome one's Yetzer Hara. Solomon, wisest of all men, said:

"Every purpose is established by counsel;  
and with good advice make war".<sup>27</sup>

The sources encourage the devising of ruses to find ways to struggle with Yetzer Hara. They use the well known didactic method of telling "Once upon a time ..." tales of people caught in an embarrassing and shaming situation from which they emerged only through a stratagem spontaneously devised:

" "That are mighty in strength ... hearkening unto the voice of his word" (Psalms 103,20) such as R. Tzadok and his companions. One matron demanded him. He said "My heart is weakened and I cannot. Is there something to eat ?" She said "There is something unclean". He said to her "What does it matter? He who does that, eats this". She lit the oven and placed the food in it. He went up and sat in the oven. She said to him "What is that?" He answered her "He who does that falls into this".<sup>28</sup>

"Rav Kahana was selling small baskets. One matron demanded him. He said to her: "Let me go and beautify myself". He went, and jumped from a roof to the ground. Elijah came and caught him. He said to him: "You troubled me over four hundred leagues". He said to him: "Wh drove me to do it, but poverty". So he gave him a vessel full of coins ". 29

"Once they brought imprisoned women to Nahardaa. They took them up to the attic of R. Amram Chassid and removed the ladder. One of them passed through the attic and her reflection came through the skylight. R. Amram took the ladder, which ten men could not raise, and raised it along (by strength of his lust) and was ascending it. When he reached the middle he stopped and raised his voice: "There is a fire in Amram's house". The disciples came and said to him: "You have shamed us". He said to them: "It is better that you be shamed of Amram in this world, and not be ashamed of me in the world to come". " 30

"When Rabbi Akiva went to Rome, they informed a minister and he sent to him two beautiful women. They washed and scented and beautified themselves as brides, and they were enticing him all night. This one saying "come to me" and the other saying "come to me". He sat between them and spat and did not turn to them. In the morning they went and complained to the minister and said to him: "We would rather die than be given to that man". He sent for him, and said to him: "How is it that you did not do with these women as it is the nature of men to do with women - are they not beautiful? Are they not human beings, like you? Did he who created you not create them?". He answered: "What can I do, their odour came to me as of the impure food which they eat". " 31

For the furthering of the struggle with Yetzer Hara, it is essential to use every available method, because Yetzer Hara has an advantage over Yetzer Hatov. The concept, familiar to all mankind, that



the former's function is more easily carried out than the latter's, was well known to our sages and expressed by them in many ways.

The verse: "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king" <sup>32</sup> is explained as:

" "Better is a poor and wise child" - that is Yetzer Hatov. It is called 'a child' because it only joins one who is thirteen years old. It is called "wise" because it teaches the people the right path. "Than an old and foolish king". - that is Yetzer Hara. It is called "old" because it joins a person from his childhood till his old age. It is called "foolish" because it teaches a man the wrong path". <sup>33</sup>

"Said R. Bar Abba: "It is written, there was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it and beseiged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man". (Ecclesiats, 9, 14-15). "A small city" - that is the body, "And a few men within it" - those are the limbs. "And there came a great king against it and beseiged it" - that is Yetzer Hara. "And built great bulwarks against it" - those are transgressions. "Now there was found in it a poor wise man" - that is Yetzer Hatov. "And he by his wisdom delivered the city" - that is repentance and good deeds. "Yet no one remembered that same poor man" - for in the time of reign of Yetzer Hara, there is no man who remembers Yetzer Hatov". <sup>34</sup>

"They said Yetzer Hara is thirteen years older than Yetzer Hatov. He is born in the insides of a man's mother and grows with him ... after

thirteen years, Yetzer Hatov is born. When a man warms himself towards vice, all his organs obey him, and when he goes for a mitzva all his organs become lazy, because Yetzer Hara is in man's insides and reigns over two hundred and forty eight organs, while Yetzer Hatov can be compared only to a prisoner in a gaol". 35

"Said Antaninus to Rabbi: "From when does Yetzer Hara reign over a man, from the time of creation or the time of birth?" He said "from the time of creation". He said "Then he should kick his mother's insides and come out". Therefore - from the time of coming out". 36

"A babe lies in a crib and puts out his hand on a snake or a scorpion and it stings him, his Yetzer Hara caused him to do it. If he puts his hands on hot coals and is burnt, it was caused only by his Yetzer Hara, for his Yetzer Hara causes him to be careless. But come and see, a kid or a lamb, if they see a well, they go back, because there is no Yetzer Hara in an animal". 37

An important conclusion from the age difference between the two Yetzarim is that while Yetzer Hara is born with each person and is therefore an integral part of his total being, Yetzer Hatov joins man only later, when he knows his mind and can distinguish between good and evil, and it can therefore expect no more than the status of a 'sub-tenant'. Ample proof of this is that Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden of Eden, because of Yetzer Hara, and only later did their eyes open so they could distinguish between good and evil.

According to our sages, then, the superior standing of Yetzer Hara is due to its being obeyed by everyone, reigning over all of man's organs, and its "seniority". It is present from the moment of birth, while Yetzer Hatov begins to function only upon reaching adulthood, at thirteen.

Therefore, it is man's nature to follow his Yetzer Hara, while in order to follow his conscience, his Yetzer Hatov, he must overcome his Yetzer Hara, and thus function against his nature. Each overcoming is in itself an act of heroism: "who is brave? One who conquers his Yetzer (Hara)." 38

Our sages dealt earnestly with Yetzer Hara's important positive function in moulding a man's character and his personality. The belief in retribution and punishment, and in fact Jewish thought is made possible only through the positing of a Yetzer Hara. This is illustrated in a legend connected with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai:

"When Moses went up to Heaven, the Ministering Angels said to the Holy One, Blessed be He: "What is one born of a woman doing among us?" He said to them: "He came to receive Torah". They said to Him "This concealed treasure, which you concealed nine hundred and seventy four generations before the creation of the world, you wish to give it to flesh and blood?" The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: "Answer them" ... He said to Him: "Master of the Universe, this Torah which you give me, what is written in it? I am the Lord your God who hath brought you out of Egypt. Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? What good would Torah be to you? What else is written in it? You shall have no other gods before me. Do you dwell among nations who worship idols? What else is written in it? Remember the seventh day to keep it holy. Do you work, that you need rest? .... What else? Honour your father and your mother. Do you have a mother and a father? What else is written in it? Thou shalt not kill, though shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Is there envy among you? is there Yetzer Hara among you?" Immediately they agreed with the Holy One, Blessed be He." 39

Because we have Yetzer Hara, we need the Torah, and Torah has no meaning without Yetzer Hara. The receiver of Torah clarifies a basic idea concerning its function. Man is under negative influences which makes difficult the living of life on high moral standards. Yetzer Hara - hate, envy, lust - might lead to murder, adultery, theft, and so the Torah comes to maintain human dignity by forbidding these actions. "I have created Yetzer Hara and created Torah as a foil".

Jewish thought accepts the fact that man has negative inclinations, and the essence of man's function is to direct these inclinations to desirable paths. This is expressed in:

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Deutoronomy 6, 5) - with both your Yetzarim. Your Yetzer Hatov and your Yetzer Hara". 40

That is to say, man is called upon to worship God with his Yetzer Hara, too. How is this possible?

It is possible in two ways. Let us interpret Yetzer Hara as the realization of man's physical desires, such as eating, drinking and coitus:

"Six things were said of man. In three he is as the Ministering Angels: he has knowledge as Ministering Angels, and walks upright as the Ministering Angels, and speaks the holy tongue, as the Ministering Angels. And in three as a beast: eat and drink as a beast, and multiplies as a beast and excretes as a beast". 41

Man is flesh and blood and cannot subsist without those functions. Yet it is his duty to perform them in such a way as to elevate him

from his beastliness and bring him as close as possible to pure, superior, "angelic" spheres.

In Agnon's writing, we find a good example for this in comparing the excess eating by the Cantor, Chemdat<sup>42</sup> to the gorging of Sebastian Montag, chief citizen.<sup>43</sup> This is apparent similarity in the actions of the two men, for both are involved in excess eating, yet even a superficial reading will show the atmosphere of purity in the description of Chemdat, and the atmosphere of impurity and beastliness in the description of Sebastian Montag.

Chemdat is elevated by raising a "beastly" action to new heights. He uses his Yetzer Hara, his physical desires, his hunger, to fulfill the mitzvah of eating much on the eve of the Day of Atonement.<sup>44</sup>

Sebastian Montag remained in his beastliness, using his "beastly" qualities only for self satisfaction.

The same is true of other "beastly" functions. Despite the fact that they belong to what our sages considered the lower category of qualities, they too can be harnessed to the worship of God.

The Midrash, too, expresses this idea:

" 'And it was very good' (Genesis 1, 31) - that is Yetzer Hara. Is Yetzer Hara very good? I wonder! Only that without it a man would not establish a home and would not take a wife and would not beget".<sup>45</sup>

One must not distance oneself from those bodily functions which are connected with Yetzer Hara:

"Yetzer Hara ..... push it aside with your left and bring it near with your right". <sup>46</sup>

That is to say, the role of embracing Yetzer Hara is placed on the right hand, which is superior to the left and this shows the appropriate approach to one's inclinations.

The second way of worshipping God by means of Yetzer Hara is in the very struggle with it. In struggling with one's Yetzer Hara, one is fulfilling God's will, and so worshipping Him. God does not desire His creatures failure:

"You do not wish the death of a man, but  
You desire his return from his evil ways,  
so that he may live". <sup>47</sup>

That is, attempted struggle with Yetzer Hara will lead to an attempt to obey positive commandments and not transgress negative ones, and so will lead to a fulfilling of God's will.

Hence are also the words said by Chassidim and other God fearing people before doing mitzvot: "for the sanctification of the Holy One, Blessed be He and his Divine Presence and to cause pleasure to the Creator". Carrying out mitzvot is an integral part of the being of any observant Jew, and is a process which repeats itself daily. The carrying out of each mitzvah involves renewed determination each time, and so the struggle with Yetzer Hara, which gives the Creator pleasure, is also constant and continuous.

Upon relying on this idea, one can explain a certain odd passage from our sages:

"In the days to come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will bring Yetzer Hara and slaughter it before Tzadikim and before villains. To the Tzadikim it seems like a high mountain, and to the villains it seems like a thread of hair. These cry and these cry. The Tzadikim cry and say: "How could we overcome so high a mountain", and the villains cry and say: "How could we not overcome this thread of hair". " 48

The passage does not explain why Yetzer Hara seems so large to the Tzadikim and so small to villains, nor what the difference in its height implies. R. Chaim Alter Halevy Berkowitz<sup>49</sup> interpreted it as follows:

When Yetzer Hara comes to tempt a Jew, if he is a Tzadik he struggles with it and repels it. And because it was said: "Man's Yetzer Hara comes upon him daily"<sup>50</sup> this must be repeated every day, and though you repel it today; it returns on the following day, and so on. It does not come, suddenly, to tempt on important matters but begins on a small scale. "At first Yetzer Hara is as cobwebs"<sup>51</sup>. If it is rejected day by day, throughout the Tzadik's life,<sup>52</sup> these matters so small and narrow as cobwebs become as high as a mountain, and in the days to come, the Tzadikim will see a quantity of rejections over a life span, amounting to much.

The villains, on the other hand, succumbed to Yetzer Hara at their first confrontation with it. For this reason, Yetzer Hara seems to them as having the breadth of a hair.

The Tzadikim cry tears of joy for their achievement, while the villains shed tears of sorrow and regret at not having attempted to battle with their problems.

This short revue of Yetzer Hara in the sources does not claim to exhaust this deep, wide topic. More than was mentioned was omitted, for there is a vast amount on the matter in our sources of every generation and our literature of every type.

The Yetzer Hara in Agnon's writing must be seen in the light of Yetzer Hara in the sources. But Agnon broadens the range. While the sources limited themselves to personal and religious Yetzer Hara, Agnon extends it to dealing with social and political Yetzer Hara, having to do with the Jewish community with Eretz Yisrael and with its resettling.

Agnon does not come to "change" the traditional role of Yetzer Hara, but gives it his own interpretation, because he sees in settling Eretz Yisrael, its social and political aspects included, as a religious mission.

The religious conflict was seen in several of our chapters, particularly with R. Yudel Chassid, who is engaged in it throughout his life. Because his actions are for Heaven's sake, he succeeds and gains Agnon's favour.

But not all those who take upon themselves a religious struggle gain all that which R. Yudel gains, though their actions too, might be for Heaven's sake. R. Feish fights for the cause of his belief,



fighting without fear or retreat:

"He did not fear for himself, and did not mind to excommunicate anyone, even though there are such who fear it, for fear it may back-fire on them, and feared no man, even a learned, God fearing one. R. Feish used to say, "even if a Divine Court finds him innocent I will go and stand at the gates of Heaven and will not let him in". " 53

He is in fact declaring war on both Heaven and earth for the sake of those ideas which he so sincerely believes. But Agnon finds a fault with him:

"Satan began to dance among them (among R. Feish and his friends in Meah Shearim - M.Y.H.), for in that generation, the secular were not important and Satan wished to dwell with the ultra-observant". 54

R. Feish is in fact quarrelsome and intriguing, and no better than his fellow in the novel, R. Gronam YeKum Purkan. He too, seems to be God fearing, but is described as:

"... knowing the sins of the generation as well as do the Angels of Destruction. And all the sins and transgressions and crimes which they sinned and transgressed and committed were well known to him, as though Satan had entrusted him with his bookkeeping". 55

In describing these two grotesque creatures, Agnon shows an interesting phenomenon. These two, who wholeheartedly believe that they are fighting Satan, actually become his partners. Satan wishes to dwell by one, and entrusts his ledger with the other. Agnon cannot tolerate extremes and these two are intolerant extremists and so their supposed battle with Satan does not only not weaken him but in

fact strengthens him. R. Feish makes his contribution to Satan by the controversy he causes, while R. Gronam does it by causing defiling of God.

We have already seen Agnon's attitude to Yitzchak Kummer, who brings about his death through his shortcomings. He is condemned by Agnon for his passivity, nor is he the only one: he is representative of a wide range of characters guilty of the same flaw.

Yitzchak's "twin" is Herschel Horwitz of Sipur Pashut (A Simple Tale). The outstanding feature of the story is Herschel's unwordly indolence. The reader will often doubt the realism in the description of his character. He is an ordinary normal young man. Yet he does not react when his domineering mother does as she pleases with him and his future. He makes no effort to free himself from the trap. The flow of the tale is such that often the reader feels that one word of resistance would be enough to redeem Herschel in the reader's eyes, but that word does not come.

For example, the cellar. Mother Tzirel is sounding a long tirade on Mina, her parents and their money and on the orphan Bluma and her poverty. And Herschel?

"Herschel stood silent ... his hands weakened - he could barely hold the jug. He had not drunk from the wine yet his head was as fermenting grapes". 56

The same is true of his betrothal:

"What did Herschel want when he took her hand? He wanted to say "I am not responsible for the insult to you". He did not manage to say it before Gildhorn came and slapped his back .... Gildhorn took Herschel's hand and held it in his own and said "I congratulate you". "57

Afterwards, Herschel discovers that his is a groom. This is no way for an adult to become betrothed.

During the party after the engagement, Heschel thinks to himself:

"I was guarded from the matchmakers, suddenly I put my head into their grip. How will I raise my head, and what will I say to Bluma?" 58

Yet he does not raise his head, nor does he announce the mistake. Though loving Bluma and being apathetic to Mina, he does not declare it, and in fact remains silent throughout.

This behaviour is most strange and almost inconceivable. Yet we must accept him as the author created him, and Herschel's end explains his beginnings. His passivity is emphasized throughout in order to prepare the ground for his future. Because he does not relieve his frustrations through any activity, he has no choice but to escape in to the shadowy world of insanity. His madness is a direct result of his passivity.

There are several other passive creatures of Agnon's pen, and some are mentioned here briefly.

Yehuda Yoel in 'Ovadia Baal Moom' is one:

"Often he would swear not to return to his evil ways, to incite his Yetzer Hator over his Yetzer Hara but within a minute Satan conjured before him her body, and when he remembered it he regretted not having spent longer with her . . . . When the next morning came he chastized himself with verses from the sages and he wanted to awaken her and go. His Yetzer Hara made him rash and he put his hand on her heart until it sunk into her flesh . . . . From then on, when his time came to go to the morning service, he could not withstand his Yetzer Hara. And not only the morning service but whenever he was in the house and none of the members of the household was there, he could not withstand his Yetzer".<sup>59</sup>

He did indeed try to resist transgression, but his attempts were not sincere and for this reason, they failed.<sup>60</sup>

Manfred Herbst from 'Shira' is another passive type, going from his wife to Shira and returning to his wife. He does not finish his book on burial of the poor in Byzantium, and he is generally not viewed by Agnon in a positive light.

The same is true of the doctor in "Harofe Ugrushato" (The Doctor and is Divorcee).<sup>61</sup> He chastizes his wife continuously for a mistake prior to her marriage, nor can he stop chastizing her, though he resolves it:

"A thousand times I regreted each word and word, and I repeated them a 'thousand times'".<sup>62</sup>

"When I had reached that conclusion I chastized myself every day for saddening her and took it

upon myself to improve things with my wife ...  
 I was already convinced that things happen  
 according to one's will ... until something  
 happened and everything became as before". 63

"At first I concealed that matter from my  
 wife. But it burst the gates of my mouth and  
 told itself". 64

The doctor is therefore a weak, unstable person. In this weakness he causes harm to himself and tragedy to others. A reading of the story will show that Agnon is dissatisfied with him.

The rule is that Agnon condemns those who are weak and succumb to their Yetzer Hara without any attempt to overcome it.

In describing Yetzer Hara, Agnon uses the symbols from our sources for it.

The most well known is Balak, the dog who bit Yitzchak Kummer in "Tmol Shilshom". It has been dealt with in this paper, so there is no need to deal with it again.

In that novel, there are other descriptions of symbols related to Yetzer Hara. For example: Sweet Leg (Regel Metuka). Sweet Leg is different from others in his mannerisms, actions and thoughts. Ordinary rules of behaviour do not apply to him, and Agnon treats him favourably:

"That man. Yochanan Leichtfus by name, was master of many trades. Although we do not generally favour one who is a master of many trades, our opinion of that man is different ....."<sup>65</sup>

That Leichtfus controls dogs completely,<sup>66</sup> and no dog has any control over him. This is because he is a staunch individualist, having clear and fixed opinions and a sturdy character. This is not to say that Leichtfus is completely free of Yetzer Hara - "Whoever is greater than his friend, his Yetzer Hara is greater than his friend's"<sup>67</sup> - for though he is free of the control of dogs, he is not saved from the bite of a snake.<sup>68</sup> Following that, he is given the nickname 'Sweet Leg'. Because Agnon uses different scales to weigh Sweet Leg, in the matter of Yetzer Hara, too, different criteria are applied to him: he is untouchable by dogs, and survives a snake bite. Normal rules of behaviour do not apply to him. His attitude to obeying mitzvot is different from other's, yet he is fortunate enough to be entered into the Rabbi from Breslow's Pardes<sup>69</sup> in his dream, and the following day the rabbi's disciples see him with his face glowing.<sup>70</sup>

Only once does a dog refuse to obey Sweet Leg and to accept his authority:

"The food in the hut was giving off a bad smell and a coarse fly came to the hut and troubled Yitzchak. Sweet Leg looked and said ...

"Tzutzik, a fly is bothering Yitzchak and you are silent?" The dog heard that, and jumped on Yitzchak. Sweet Leg rebuked him with his finger and said, "A dog's brain. I tell him to harm the fly which harmed Yitzchak and he harms Yitzchak who was harmed by the fly". "<sup>71</sup>

The scene in Sweet Leg's hut is worthy of attention. The fly is none other than Yetzer Hara - "Yetzer Hara is like a fly" <sup>72</sup> - and it is this fly which bothers Yitzchak. In sending the dog to drive away the fly, Sweet Leg is implying the saying 'serve your God with all your heart' ... "with all your Yetzerim - your Yetzer Hatov and your Yetzer Hara". <sup>73</sup> That is: problems with Yetzer Hara may be solved by use of that selfsame Yetzer Hara. For this reason, he sends the "dog" to drive away the "fly". However, this does not help Yitzchak, and the "dog", too, harms him. This is because of intrinsic weakness. <sup>74</sup> Without coming to terms with his own problems, outside assistance cannot help him.

Another distinct symbol of Yetzer Hara in 'Tmol Shilshom', is Lilith who relates to Balak "The Tale of the Hyena". <sup>75</sup> Lilith is recognized as being connected with indecent behaviour between the sexes, <sup>76</sup> and this is implied in the tale:

"There was one old Lilith there who knew the world and knew what happens under the beams of every roof ..."

The phrase "beams of a roof" is connected in our sources with modesty:

"The Rabbis said "Kimchit had seven sons, and all served in high priesthood. Wise men asked her: "What did you do that you were so privileged?" She said to them: "The beams of my roof never saw the plaits of my hair". " <sup>77</sup>

That is to say, she was modest, while the old Lilith "knew what happened under the beams of every roof".

Lilith's dialogue with Balak is loaded with symbolism, particularly the story of the hypocritical hyenas<sup>78</sup> which were slaughtered by Arzaf. But this is not the place to dwell on it. The essence of Lilith's story - and it is particularly illuminating to hear it from her - is that it was the hyenas' envy which brought their end. Perhaps Agnon wanted to hint at the sages' saying the "Envy, lust and esteem send a man from the world".<sup>79</sup> Envy - the hyenas. Lust - that's Lilith. Esteem is symbolized by the hunted, lowly Balak who seeks esteem and honour.

Our sages have already said:

"Yetzer Hara does not walk on the sides but  
in the centre".<sup>80</sup>

Agnon chose the struggle with it as a centre for his writings. As was said in the preface, Shai Agnon's writing is of topical, direct interest, and so it is not surprising that he meets the quarry, Yetzer Hara not on the sides but at the very centre of his work.



REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "ON YETZER HARA IN AGNON'S WRITINGS"

1. Our sages stated that "He is Satan, he is Yetzer Hara, he is the Angel of Death" (Baba Batra, 16). We will therefore not separate the various terms in this chapter, all three having one meaning for our purpose.
2. M.D. Casato - M'Adam ad Noah, p. 4, 21-23, 30. See also, Y. Kaufman, Toldot Hæmuna HaYisreelit, Vol. 1 pp. 419-435, Vol 2. pp. 404-415.
3. Chagiga 12,1
4. Baba Batra 74,2 F
5. Isiah 51, 9-10
6. Jeremiah 5,22
7. Psalms 74,13
8. *ibid.* 89,11
9. Job 7,12
10. *ibid.* 26, 10
11. Isiah 27,1
12. Sukka 52,1
13. Pirkei De Rabbi Eliezer 13
14. Devarim Rabba 11,6
15. The original meaning of 'mal-ach', Hebrew for angel, is 'messenger'.
16. Yoma 69,1. See also Avoda Zara 17,1. The Song of Songs 7, 13.

17. Berachot 61,1
18. This is true even of the last two passages quoted, and there the form of expression is metaphorical.  
Shabbat, 105,2: "Which is the alien god that is in man's body? That is to say: Yetzer Hara".  
  
See also: Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9,1 Shmot Rabba 41,12.
19. Berachot 16,2
20. Shmot Rabba 46,3
21. ibid.
22. Kiddushin 30,2
23. Sukka 52,2 Kiddushin 30,3
24. Berachot 5,1
25. Bereshit Rabba 70,8
26. It is important to be aware of the fact that the Torah is an aid in the struggle against Yetzer Hara, because, as will be shown later in the chapter, Yetzer Hara seems stronger than Yetzer Hatov, and if Yetzer Hara has the advantage, where is free choice, and what point in "inciting Yetzer Hatov over Yetzer Hara?"  
  
This also hinders the principle of "retribution and reward". Our sages deliberately point out the protective powers of Torah, to imply a certain equality in strength. Yetzer Hatov, together with Torah, can serve as a counterbalance to Yetzer Hara, on condition that one joins in this struggle with all possible strength and determination. In this context see: Bereshit Rabba 22,54. Avoda Zara 8,2. Avot Derabbi Nathan 16. Vayikra Rabba 23,35.
27. Proverbs 20, 18
28. Kiddushin, 40,1

29.     ibid.
30.     ibid. 81,1
31.     Avot Derabbi Nathan 16. See also Sifrei Va-Etchanan, Kiddushin 81,1. Maaseh Berabbi Meir Uverabbi Bar-Ashi, Tanchuma Behaalotcha 10.
32.     Ecclesiastes 4,13
33.     Kohelet Rabbati 4,15
34.     Nedarim 32,2
35.     Avot Derabbi Nathan 16
36.     Bereshit Rabba 34,12
37.     Avot Derabbi Nathan, 16
38.     Avot, 4,1
39.     Shabbat 88,2 - 89,1
40.     Berachot 44,1
41.     Chagiga 16,1. This is quoted also in Bereshit Rabba 8,11 and there is added "and sees as the ministering angels, and dies as a beast".
42.     Samuch Venireh pp. 62-74
43.     Bineareinu Uvizkeneinu, in Al Kapot HaMan-ul, pp. 322-327
44.     "And you shall afflict your souls on the ninth day" (Leviticus 23,32). Surely not on the ninth, but on the tenth? To teach you that whoever eats and drinks on the ninth, it is considered as though he fasted on the ninth and on the tenth". Yoma 81,1
45.     Bereshit Rabba 9,9
46.     Sotta, 47,1

47. From The prayer of the Day of Atonement. This Jewish approach is well known, and the references of Atonement to it in the sources are too innumerable to be mentioned.
48. Sukka 52,1
49. Head of the YeShiva in Vac in Hungary, he gave this interpretation, possibly from another source.
50. Sukka 52,1
51. *ibid.*
52. "A man walks with another for a short while, he becomes his friend. But Yetzer Hara is born with a person and grows up with him all his life..... If he finds opportunity to fail him at twenty, or forty or seventy or eighty - he fails him"  
Midrash Socher Tov, Tehillim 34.
53. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 317
54. *ibid.* p. 318
55. *ibid.* p. 560
56. Sipur Pashut in Al Kapot Haman-ul p. 95
57. *ibid.* p. 108
58. *ibid.* p. 111
59. Al Kapot Haman-ul p. 420, 421
60. Compare his attempts to those of Shlomo Yaakov, 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 66-67.
61. Al Kapot Haman-ul p. 469-490
62. *ibid.* p. 479
63. *ibid.* p. 481
64. *ibid.* p. 481

65. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 71
66. ibid. pp. 375-6, 425, 430.
67. Sukka 52,1
68. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 72. Any snake is considered a symbol of manifestation of temptation. It's Yetzer Hara essence is much more clear than the dog's.
69. Here: intimate circle of followers.
70. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 376
71. ibid. p. 430
72. Berachot 61,1. See 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 333: "Yitzchak was on his bed ... flies and mosquitoes came. He drove them away and all sorts of thoughts came. Yitzchak was pondering things which he had already pondered and did not want to ponder ... droves, upon droves of thoughts, and with them Sonya's Jaffa". Flies are exchanged for thoughts of Sonya, and the role which Sonya plays in Yitzchak's life is well known.
73. Berachot 54,1
74. It must be noted that all this happens after hearing Sweet Leg's unconventional opinions on 'mitzvot and transgression' See 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 429, 430.
75. ibid. pp. 571-575
76. "Lilith" (Isiah 34,14) is explained by Rashi as "name of a female demon" and by Metzudat Zion as "mother of demons". "It is forbidden to sleep alone in a house, and whoever sleeps alone in a house is seized by Lilith" Shabbat 151,2. In rabbinic and morality literature, Lilith plays an important function in causing sexual transgressions. Moreover, she endangers babies and women in childbirth.
77. Yoma 47,1

- 78. The root for the Hebrew word for "hyena" is the same as for "hypocrite".
- 79. Avot 4, 21
- 80. Bereshit Rabba 22, 13

### RATIONALIZATION

"He who commanded the oil, and it burnt, he will command the vinegar, and it will burn." <sup>1</sup>

This Talmudic saying serves as the basis for the philosophies of many of Agnon's characters, and of his own philosophy. To him who "spoke and the world came into being", nothing is impossible. The definition of any occurrence as a "miracle" is no more than a linguistic convention. We do not define a frequent phenomenon as a miracle, though we might not understand it, and apply that term only to rare phenomena. Yet in principle, if we wish to trace an occurrence to its reason, to its primary and ultimate cause, there is no difference between rare and frequent happenings.

This approach eases for Agnon the passage from descriptions of the natural to descriptions of the super natural, and it is clear in all his works, not only in "The Book of Deeds". Such descriptions are many and will not be detailed here. However, it must be mentioned that what is common to all, is a smooth transfer from the rational to the irrational. The reader feels no need to raise an astonished eyebrow when Frumit, wife of R. Yudil, enters the cave and finds a treasure. There is no sense of having left the real world and of having entered a mystery world. The activity in the cave is normal, as is the behaviour after leaving it. <sup>2</sup>

We have seen Agnon's unequivocal opinion concerning the return to the Jewish people to their homeland. <sup>3</sup> By attributing it to a natural process, he places the struggle for the successful completion of

this return on the shoulders of those who can work towards it.

Agnon takes every opportunity to rationalize the seemingly inexplicable. He actually takes us into his workshop, showing us the raw materials which are the substance of his stories. This is a recurring phenomena in his writings, and a few examples follow:

"When they parted, R. Yudil gave Netta a tried and tested Charm for binging peace between a man and his wife. R. Yudil told Netta: "Go to the market and buy a new knife from the shopkeeper and pay him as much as he asks and take an apple, cut it in two and give it to her to eat, and if you do it, she will love you." <sup>4</sup>

Yudil is described as though there is something magical in his Charm: the knife must be new, the shopkeeper must be given any amount he asks. Yet the "mechanism" activating the Charm is very simple:

"When he came to his wife he gave her half, and because he brought her a gift, she asked: "Why is today different from other days, that you brought me a gift?" for from the day they were wed he had not brought her anything. Netta answered 'I do not know', and lowered his head. She took the apple and ate and love for him entered her heart and she did not quarrel with him again". <sup>5</sup>

The finding of the treasure in the cave is also given a rational explanation:

"And from where did gold coins and precious stones come into that cave? It happened so that when the Emperor fought with his enemies, the great men of the country went with him to conceal their treasures in the earth. And when that woman's troubles came



before the Holy One, Blessed be He, He revealed all the treasures to her. Blessed be the Almighty Blessed be He, who does not take His eyes off His people, Israel, and everything He will do in the days to come, He does part of it now. Those ministers robbed Jews and stole their money, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, destroyed them and gave their treasures to those who please Him. A thief who coveted others' fortunes was buried in a foreign land, while his gold and silver were buried in his homeland. None but animals and birds of prey enjoyed his body, while a righteous and pious man enjoyed his gold and silver".<sup>6</sup>

Agnon troubles to explain rationally the only event in the history of R. Yudil Chassid which can be classed as "miraculous".

A similar approach is evident in the story "Ha-Etza" (The Advice),<sup>7</sup> concerning the "miracle" of the Rabbi from Behosh. He tells the innkeeper who is in trouble:

"This I tell you: which ever journey you may undertake, whether to Bucharest or back, travel only in a gentleman's carriage".

The innkeeper obeyed:

"He went to the railway station and bought a first class ticket, to obey what the great Tzadik had told him, to travel only in a gentleman's carriage".

In the course of his journey, he meets the examining magistrate who can save him, and when he is saved:

"The Chassidim came to that Tzadik in Behosh and cried before him "Our master, our master, you are so powerful and yet you leave us troubled and needy! " He said to them: "Do not say that I have performed a miracle, everything was done by the Master of Mercy, Blessed be He, in

His pity. I advised him to travel in a gentleman's carriage only because if he would have travelled in ordinary folk's carriage when he was persecuted, they would have found him and placed him in gaol and he would have rotted there, Heaven forbid. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to save him and in His mercy, Blessed be He, He arranged it so that the chief magistrate travelled with him. I did nothing, only advised him".

The saying of the sages, that "dwelling in Eretz Yisrael is weighed against all other mitzvot" <sup>8</sup> is also given a rational explanation by Agnon:

"All the mitzvot of the Torah only concern a part of the body. The phylacteries: the head and the arm, the Tzitzit: the heart, and is only worn during the day, and men are obliged but women are not. The mitzvah of Sukka is only on the Holy Day, and men are obliged and women are not. The mitzvah of Matzah is only on Pesach and is obliged to eat it only on the first night. When a man dies, he is free of mitzvot. But dwelling in Eretz Yisrael encompasses the entire body and applies equally to men, women and children and is at night as in the day. It is never annulled, and when one dies, one is buried in it's soil and it atones for one ... and it is weighed against all other mitzvot". <sup>9</sup>

The treatment of the custom, verging on superstition, of placing garlic on tombstones <sup>10</sup> is given a similar treatment. Garlic is known in the folklore of several nations - particularly in Northern Europe - as having magical powers and being a charm against witchcraft, and it is for this reason that it is placed on tombstones.

Agnon writes:

"And the townspeople came each to his family's graves, and peeled garlic and threw it to drive away maggots, so that the peace of the dead will be complete".<sup>11</sup>

Agnon links two things. Maggots are known to live on dead bodies<sup>12</sup> and garlic is a medical counter to worms: "five things were said of garlic ... and it kills the worms of the intestines".<sup>13</sup> Agnon links the maggots which disturb the dead's rest to the medical qualities of garlic for living flesh, and so rationalizes a superstition.

Another topic connected with the cemetery is approached in a similar manner:

"Some are afraid of going to the grave of a father and the grave of a mother on one day, and they are right. When I went to Father's grave, my eyes were well, but when I went to Mother's grave, my eyes were hidden by tears".<sup>14</sup>

Needless to say, the reason for refraining from visiting the graves of both parents on one day is not the fear of shedding excess tears, yet Agnon prefers to give a logical reason for this custom.

The same is true of the custom of lighting a memorial candle for those martyrs killed for God's name:

"There is another new custom which I introduced in our old House of Study. When the war began, the perpetual light went out, and I lit it in front

of the plaque on the wall on which are inscribed the names of the holy congregations which were slaughtered in the pogroms of 1648. Do those who die as martyrs need an earthly light, for every Tzadik and Tzadik who is killed by the Gentiles, his soul glows before the Divine Seat so that even the Seraphs cannot look at it? It is in order that one should look and see the extent of the love of Israel for their Heavenly father".<sup>15</sup>

In connection with memorial candles and the questions connected with them, we are confronted with "reversed" rationalization. In "Gzeilat Hamet" (Robbing of the Dead)<sup>16</sup>, the beadle has the problem that the memorial candles do not burn long enough. The readers, who know the reason, are sorry for the beadle's predicament, but do not share his wonder and guessing. He tries to find a reason for this surprising phenomenon:

"The beadle was wondering that this oil which is enough to burn for a day, why does it not complete its day? Probably those souls for whom they are lit have been incarnated many times, and each candle which he lights for them burns at once for each incarnation, and for this reason it burns quickly. One candle in the house of study burns for a whole day, while another burns half a day or less, according to the number of the deceased's incarnations."

Agnon is clearly describing the beadle's ideas and suppositions with more than a hint of irony. Here too there is evidence of the tendency to find a natural reason for a super-natural happening.

In "Tmol Shilshom", too, this conception of Agnon is in evidence several times:

"The tea in Jerusalem is better than any tea in the world, because it is made from rain water, and there is nothing better for tea than rainwater". 17

"Once on the day after the Holy Day she went to the grave of Shimon the Tzadik and broke her leg and became a cripple. Now the graves of Tzadikim bring cure, and how did this mishap happen on the grave of a Tzadik? Only she went to show off her new dress, and her legs became entangled in the dress and she broke her leg". 18

"Our brothers sons of our uncle Yishmael ..... come and go ... and in their walking they push those who pray, that they should not gain strength in their prayers and so bring the redemption". 19

This is in keeping with Agnon's general approach, as witnessed throughout his writings. Not every unnatural phenomenon is a miracle, nor is every natural phenomenon to be taken for granted. These as the others are God's works, and are viewed by Agnon with wonder and gratitude.

# REFERENCE AND NOTES TO "RATIONALIZATION"

1. Taanit, 25, 1. See above p. 27 ff
2. 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 397-398
3. See above p. 208
4. 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 222
5. ibid.
6. ibid. 398-399
7. Elu Ve'Elu pp. 333-337
8. Sifrei, Reeh, 12
9. Bilvav Yamim, in Elu Ve'Elu pp. 520-521
10. See 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 318, Vehaya He Akov LeMishor, in Elu Ve'Elu p. 124, Al Kapot Haman-ul p. 431
11. Al Kapot Haman-ul p. 432
12. Berachot 18, 2  
Avot 4, 4  
Kohelet Rabba 5, 10
13. Babba Kama 84, 1
14. 'A Guest for the Night' p. 83
15. ibid. p. 129
16. 'The Bridal Canopy' pp. 314-322
17. 'Tmol Shilshom' p. 196
18. ibid. p. 225
19. ibid. p. 350

## SOURCES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN AGNON RESEARCH

"Who were my masters in poetry and literature? This is subject for disagreement. Some see in my books the influences of authors of whom I have not even heard, while others see in my books the influences of poets whose name I have heard but whose works I have not read. What is my opinion? From whom did I draw? Not each man who drinks a drop of milk remembers the name of the cow whose milk he drank.

In order not to leave you empty handed, I will try to clarify from whom I received what I received. First and foremost the Holy Scripts, from which I learnt to link letters. Second to them Mishna and Talmud and midrashim and Rashi's interpretation of the Torah. After them rabbinic literature and our holy poets and the wise men of the Middle Ages, at the head of whom is our master Maimonides, of blessed memory". <sup>1</sup>

True, the author is not obliged to be aware of his sources at the time of writing, but this does not apply to the readers, particularly of readers of an author such as Agnon, who admits that his work is based largely on ancient sources.

The critics did indeed recognize the importance of revealing Agnon's sources, and this is true not only of those who study the linguistic side of his work but of students of all aspects.

Almost half a century ago, A.M. Lifshitz wrote:

"He requires penetration into the magic world which is his gateway .... he is comprehended only by those who grasp ... the language of the emotions which he specifies. He who is not familiar with his world, it is sealed before him with six rings". <sup>2</sup>

"The language here is from the Braita and the Midrash, books of morality and other God fearing books. He knows how to find and discover treasures of words, and new forms and the abundance of his choice and personality in this style".<sup>3</sup>

In interpreting the story "Pat Shlema"<sup>4</sup> (A Whole Loaf) Kurtzweil uses the method of relying on the sources in order to identify Dr. Yekutiel Neeman with Moses.<sup>5</sup> He reaches this conclusion by mentioning the fact that 'Yekutiel' is one of Moses' ten names,<sup>6</sup> and 'Ne-eman' from the verse 'who is faithful in all my house'.<sup>7</sup> Kurtzweil's discovery is of major importance not only in that it contributes to the understanding of that story and so to Agnon's entire works, but also because it was a pioneer in using the method of returning to the sources in order to discern the deeper levels of Agnon's work.

Let us quote the opinions of two others of the many who dealt with this subject:

"The Agnonian text is very concise from a content point of view and even more so linguistically. The Agnonian passage is in itself structured with exemplary craftsmanship, loaded with knowledge and symbols, hints and associations from all sources of living and historical Judaism, and from all layers of Hebrew literature from institutionalized religion and from folk tradition, from overall Jewish law and from sectarian custom, from past, from present. Generally, Agnon's stories are permeated and imbued with Jewish culture in its traditional manifestations".<sup>8</sup>

"The connection between the language of Agnon and the language of the sages is self evident ... Professional literary criticism which was not preceded by extensive searching in the literature of Midrash



and Halacha, by means of which we labour to decode that which the author has coded, is like a carriage preceding the horses. Tens of places in Agnon's writing can be pointed out ... whose simple intention and literary meaning escaped many. Sometimes these unexplained places bear the key to the understanding of the entire work ... one cannot enter any matter deeply without finalizing the question of the relation of that matter to the sources".<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the demand for reading and understanding Agnon in the light of the sources has become a cornerstone in his criticism.<sup>10</sup>

It seems almost unnecessary to mention the important role which the sources played in this paper, and their bearing on the Agnonian text. Without a knowledge of the sources it would have been impossible to identify Chananya or his fellow traveller, "he whose name we have forgotten". In the analysis of other characters, the depth of understanding reached was possible only through the knowledge and application of phrases from the sources. This is true particularly of R. Avigdor, R. Moshe Pinchas and others.

To clarify this point of the importance of knowing and relating to the sources let us bring several further examples which will prove that often the correct understanding of one word can throw a correct light on the entire work, while ignoring the source can lead to a wrong interpretation of a whole book.

In connection with 'The Bridal Canopy', Yonah David writes:

"And before our eyes are spread out the entire Jewish people in Galicia, with all their qualities and manners, customs and values and shortcomings, and all in biting, satirical style, in order to show the Jewish batlan (unworldly indolent) in his nakedness".<sup>11</sup>

Although he does not say it distinctly, Y. David is clearly referring to R. Yudil's own reference to himself as a batlan<sup>12</sup>, and from this Yonah David concludes that if R. Yudil is such a one, so are the rest of the members of his social class, who share his views. An unbiased reader who reads 'The Bridal Canopy' will sense the love flowing from the author towards his simple characters, and the criticism "in biting, satirical style" is certainly not directed at R. Yudil or at his fellows.<sup>13</sup> Their description is done with exquisite lyricism.

Or the description of Yehoshua Elazer and his wife Feigel.<sup>14</sup> Only figures loved and admired by the author could share such undemanding love. He is used to fasting, she is crippled by an incurable disease. Yet their love, lyric and romantic, is expressed in the simple dialogue which takes place in "the cellar that leaks from the inside and water is poured on it from the outside and its walls are full of cracks which are crawling with worms". We witness purity, spiritual elevation and dedication which are incomparable.

Agnon succeeds to draw from stagnating poverty those elements of human dignity which he sees in his characters. He annuls the value of materialism by dramatic confrontation between content and form. This is done frequently in 'The Bridal Canopy' and can be said of Yerachmiel the teacher, the old plaster-digger and many, many others. Clearly Agnon does not come to "show them in their

nakedness", for they are not naked, but are wrapped in a mantle of glory even in their shabby physical conditions.

The question must therefore be asked: What caused such grave error in interpreting 'The Bridal Canopy'? It was probably the word batlan. As the word is commonly used, meaning "unworldly idler", it can indeed be said of R. Yudel. However, there is no doubt that Agnon uses the word in its original meaning: "One who idles in order to be in the synagogue mornings and evenings".<sup>15</sup> The fact that Agnon's intention was such is further proved by the fact that immediately after R. Yudel's declaration that he is a 'batlan', he says, as if to explain his meaning: "and I pray in the old House of Study in a south western corner".

This is a clear example of how misunderstanding one word can mar the entire interpretation of a novel.

In using the sources, Agnon shows the battles which rage in the depths of the character's souls, while the surface remains calm, hiding the true meaning of events from the inexperienced eye, and this is sometimes done by the change of only one letter.<sup>16</sup>

We read the tranquil, controlled description of the Seder night in the tax-collector's home.<sup>17</sup> Everything seems to be in perfect order, and the reading of the Song of Songs, together, after the Passover meal, is the ultimate in innocence. The raging of lust, unbridled, in the heart of the fat fiancée, and her true feelings for her frightened fiancé, are well hidden until her innermost feelings are revealed when she says to Shlome Yaakov: Lie in Peace".

Agnon knows that "in peace" and "with peace" are not interchangeable:

"He who parts from the dead does not say 'go with peace' but 'go in peace'. He who parts from the living says to him not 'go in peace' but 'go with peace'. He who parts from the dead does not say 'go with peace', for it was said (Genesis 15, 15) "And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace". He who parts from the living does not say to him 'go in peace', for David said to Absalom (Samuel II 15, 9): 'go in peace', and he hung. Jethro who said to Moses (Exodus 4, 18): 'go with peace' - he went and succeeded". 18

Through exchanging one letter, the Lamed for a Beit, ('with' for 'in') Agnon reveals the true meaning of the treacherous fiancée's suggestion 'lie in peace and rest upon your place in peace'.

In contrast with the unsuspecting reader, who does not notice the tainted flow beneath the calm, Shlomo Yaakov understands well the trap which has been laid for him and for his soul.

The tempting odour of the fat fiancée tickles the ascetic young man's nostrils and seems to drive him out of his own mind, yet he struggles with everything in him in order to be saved. His soul is bordering on destruction, and he holds onto every possible means for survival. What does he hold on to? The edges of the table: "Shlomo Yaakov sits and holds on to the edges of the table while absorbing her odour". From our sources, the implication of "holding on to edges" is well known. One who is escaping from an attempt on his life does it. This is true of Adoniyahu<sup>19</sup> and of Yoav<sup>20</sup>. The sources compare a table to the altar. R. Yochanan and R. Elazar both said:

"As long as the Temple existed, the altar atoned for Israel's sins, and now a man's table atones". <sup>21</sup>

In fact, Shlomo Yaakov senses the danger immediately upon entering the tax-collector's home. For this reason he clutches his Gemarrah. Holding onto any religious objects assist in furthering transgression. <sup>22</sup>

Without knowledge of the sources, the subtlety and deeper meaning of this story would have been lost. The same is true of many other stories, <sup>23</sup> as we have seen throughout this paper.

REFERENCE AND NOTES TO:

"SOURCES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN AGNON RESEARCH"

1. From Shai Agnon's speech at the Nobel Prize awarding ceremony in Stockholm.
2. A.M. Lifshitz Ketavim, p. 207. This article was written in 1926.
3. ibid. p. 222
4. Samuch Venireh pp. 143-155
5. B. Kurtzweil, Masot pp. 86-94
6. Vayikra Rabba 1, 3
7. Numbers 12, 7 The Hebrew for 'faithful' is 'neeman'
8. A.E. Rivlin, in Hachinuch Nisan 5727, pp. 179-185
9. Y.M. Ta-Shema, Midrash Agnon, in Hachinuch, Nisan 5727, pp. 155-162.
10. Below are listed some of those who deal with the subject:
  1. A.Y. Brawer, Mevoot Historiyim Vegeographiyim Lechitvei Agnon, in Yuval Shai p. 36.
  2. Y. Elstein, Igulim Vayosher p. 119
  3. Y. Frankel, Haamaka Bilshon Sipurei Agnon, in Hachinuch, Nisan 5727, p. 186 ff
  4. S.D. Goitein, Beshaa Achat, in LeAgnon Shai p. 28
  5. A. Hilewitz, Sfato Shel Agnon Leor Hamekorot, in Barkai, October, 1967.
  6. D. Sadan, Al Shai Agnon pp. 157-159
  7. A. Sarid, Hadisonance Hasignoni Besipurei Agnon, in Gazit, Kislev-Adar 5702, pp. 110-114

8. E. Urbach, Shnei Talmidei Chachamim Shehayu Be-Ireinu, in LeAgnon Shai p. 23.
9. S. Werses, Sipur Veshorsho pp. 183-200, 210-214.

Agnon himself expressed the need to return to the sources: "Modern Hebrew writers had jumped into European literature and copied German authors instead of going back to Hebrew sources. These are the Midrashim, Jewish folklore, Chassidic stories, and even the Responsa literature ..." Zvi. E. Kurtzweil: I have lunch with S.Y. Agnon, The Jewish Chronicle 25.2.1955 p. VIII.

11. Y. David, Prakim Besifrut, part 2, p. 4
12. 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 13
13. See above p. in "Those Good Old Days"
14. 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 83-85
15. Rashi to Megilla, 3, 2. See also Babba Kama 82, and Sanhedrin 17, 2.
16. Kurtzweil wrote: "The tension and dynamism which are revealed to the reader who delves deeply into Agnon's 'simple' types is internal in two senses. Firstly, almost nothing occurs outwardly. More precisely - the majority of happenings is not external". Masot p. 15-16. See also above p.
17. 'The Bridal Canopy' pp. 70-72
18. Moed Katan 29, 1 See also Berachot 64, 1
19. Kings I 1, 50
20. ibid. 2, 28
21. Berachot 55, 1
22. See Taamei Haminhagim p. 489. See also 'The Bridal Canopy' p. 53. Al Kapot Haman-ul p. 414 HaEsh Vechaetzim p. 109. Elu Ve'Elu p. 31
23. "Shai Olamot- Mekorot LeAgnon - Hachnasat Kala" (Sources to 'The Bridal Canopy' published recently by myself, contains approximately one thousand references to the sources in that novel alone).

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